MEA CULPA: A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

HENRY HARLAND

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A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

BY

HENRY HARLAND

IN THREE VOLUMES
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MEA CULPA:

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD.

PART IV.—*Continued.*

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II.

I WISH most earnestly in making this confession to extenuate nothing, and to set down nothing in malice. I have not recounted the foregoing scene for the purpose of casting discredit upon Prince Léonticheff, or of exculpating myself. Indeed, I realise perfectly well that I was by no means entirely blameless, that perhaps I was as much to blame as he was. I can see that my attitude, my conduct, and my speech must have been extremely exasperating to him; that I ought, in all right and justice, to have met him in a kinder, friendlier, more sympathetic spirit. I can imagine that if I had done so, he on

his side would have behaved differently, and things from that time forth might have gone better with us, instead of worse. No, I do not wish to excuse myself, or to prejudice him. Whether he was to blame, or I was to blame, or we were equally to blame, what happened happened; and to tell what happened, honestly and plainly, not to assign the blame for it, is the task I have set myself. He insulted me, and struck me, and that was all wrong; but I had infuriated him, and that was all wrong too; so perhaps it was six of one and half a dozen of the other.

But, though I think that to-day, at this distance, I can take a fair and reasonable view of it, at the time I could do nothing of the kind.

If I had been able then, as I am now, to make allowances for him, and to appreciate my own share of the responsibility, doubt-

less we might have forgiven each other, our quarrel might have served to clear the air between us, and we might have begun our life anew, upon a better footing, a more thorough understanding. But, as I say, I could do nothing of the kind. The blow he struck me seemed to set my brain on fire; I was consumed by a wild, unutterable pain and rage and hatred; I could think of nothing else, I could feel nothing else. I clenched my fists, and looked at him, and if wishes could have killed, he would have died on the spot. It was well perhaps that there were no more deadly weapons within my reach.

I did not speak to him again till after our arrival in London, at Salchester House. At first, for a long while, he himself did not speak. His bearing after his explosion was that of a wronged superior being, who had been compelled, to his regret, to resort to

extreme measures. It seemed to say, 'There! You see! I have had to be severe with you. I am sorry it came to that, but it was your own fault. You drove me to it, you deserved it, you made it necessary, you brought it upon yourself. I regret not what I did, but the necessity I was under to do it.' Very like the bearing of a virtuous parent, who has been forced to inflict bodily punishment upon his erring child. This self-righteous attitude on his part was like fuel to the fires of my resentment. Oh, how I hated him! How fiercely my heart burned! How intensely I longed in some way to revenge myself upon him! How it baffled and maddened me to realise that I was absolutely powerless to do so!

But gradually these first violent feelings subsided, giving way to a dull aching misery: a sense of utter desolation and friendlessness. Here I was, all, all alone

with him, with this man whom I feared and hated, between whom and myself there was no possible ground of understanding or sympathy, yet whose wife I was, so that he had to me all the right, and over me all the power, that law and tradition give a husband! It seemed to me very awful. It filled me with a vague but keen alarm and dread. Oh, if I could but see a friendly face, hear a friendly voice; anything to break this terrible sense of being alone with him! I thought of my father, thousands of miles away in Russia. I thought of Armidis, the only other friend I had in the world, virtually just as far away, in Paris. And yes,—I thought of Julian North; but that thought was as guiltless and as despairing as the thought of one who is dead. And then I returned to the actual present place and time, and saw myself alone in that railway carriage with Prince Léonticheff; and my

feeling of friendlessness was bitter beyond expression.

When we left the train at Calais, and my maid joined me, I could have thrown myself into her arms, and kissed her, and wept upon her shoulder ; she was the only human being in my horizon with whom I could exchange a friendly word.

The Prince left her and me together in the cabin he had engaged, during the crossing, and for that hour and a half I was almost happy, such relief it gave me to escape his presence.

He broke silence for the first time after we had taken our places in the train from Dover.

'Come ! don't you think you have sulked long enough ?' he asked.

At the sound of his voice, all my violent feelings of rage and hatred were instantly revived. I bit my lips, and did not speak.

I could not have spoken. It was a choice between keeping silence, and screaming out.

'Now, really, Monica,' he went on, in his softest and most plausible accents, 'you are behaving like an unreasonable child. A woman, a mature human being, if she has anything on her mind, talks it out; it's the part of a silly, stubborn little child just to sit in a corner, and pout and sulk and refuse to speak. Come! let us understand each other. I struck you. I suppose that's what you're sulking about, so I'll admit at once that I struck you. Well, I'm sorry I struck you. I'm sorry I had to strike you. I don't believe I struck you hard enough to hurt you; there's no mark. But I'm sorry all the same. The trouble was that you drove me to it. It was the only way of moving you, of stirring you up. I'd tried in vain to talk to you, to argue with you: you

were deaf. I'd exhausted every means of appealing to your intelligence, and then I struck you. Well, when a woman deliberately behaves like a child, she's got to expect to be treated like one. You did behave like a child; you're behaving like one now; and I struck you because that's the only way of getting any satisfaction out of a child. However, as I say, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I gave way to my impulse. I suppose I ought to have borne with you longer. But you have no idea how trying you were. If you could see yourself even at this moment! By Jove, I believe very few men would be as patient with you as I am.'

Still I did not speak. I had nothing to say, except that I hated him and despised him; and it seemed to me that it would be a condescension on my part to tell him that.

I thought, 'He may talk and talk and

talk ; but I will not lower myself so far as to utter one syllable in reply.'

He waited a little; then, 'Will you pay me the compliment of answering me?' he demanded.

Again he waited a moment. At last he gave a short, angry laugh. 'By God, I believe you want to make me do it again,' he cried. 'Well, if you enjoy making a sickening idiot of yourself, you may. I won't trouble myself to notice you.'

But at the end of perhaps a half-hour's dignified silence, he began anew...

'Oh, this is too absurd. What is it that you are thinking about, what are you meditating, as you sit there with your back up, and your lips stuck out, as silent as if you were dumb?'

He gave me time to reply ; but then, as I did not reply, 'Well, have you got a tongue

in your head? I am waiting to hear what you have to say?'

But I said nothing.

'Come! You've got to open your mouth, if I have to prise it open with a chisel. Do you hear me? I want to know what it is you've got on your mind. Whatever it is, out with it. If you want to abuse me, abuse me. Say your say. Only don't put on these airs of a tragedy-queen. You'll make me laugh. If you want to curse me, curse me *vivâ-voce*. If you go on swallowing your venom, it may strike in. You'd better spit it out. There! I've pleaded with you long enough. I won't plead with you any more. I fall back now upon my rights. I will thank you to remember that I'm your husband; and now I demand as my right to be told what it is you're turning over in your obstinate little brain.'

And so from time to time he would renew

his efforts to make me speak, now imploring, now threatening, now arguing, now commanding, — whilst I, it cannot be denied, derived a certain malicious satisfaction from the spectacle of his impotent annoyance— until we reached Salchester House, and I had been shown to my own apartments, and supposed myself rid of him for the night.

But I had not been alone five minutes, when he joined me; opening the door of my dressing-room, which I had forgotten to lock, without the formality of rapping.

He sent my maid away, and then he said to me, 'I am not going to bed to-night, I am not going to let you go, until we have had this out. Now the sooner you open your lips and speak, the sooner you'll be left to your own devices.'

He sat down, and settled himself in his chair with the effect of a fixture.

'Here I sit,' he said, 'until I hear your

voice. And I can't allow you to leave the room before me.'

I looked at him, and I realised with a certain mixture of despair and weariness that he would probably be as good as his word.

'Well? You wish me to speak. What do you wish me to say?' I demanded.

'Why, look here, Monica,'—dropping his tone of authority, and becoming persuasive, —'I wish without rancour or ill-feeling to talk this thing over with you. Things have come to a sort of crisis between us, and it's best on all accounts that we should talk our thoughts out, and understand each other. I struck you to-day in the train. I've already told you that I'm sorry I did so. I don't think I struck you hard enough to hurt you, and I do think that you deserved it; but all the same I'll admit at once that it would have been better if I hadn't struck you at all, no matter how

lightly, no matter if you did deserve it. There, I've made an apology. Now I want to know whether you can be generous enough to accept it? You've been pouting your lips and brooding over it ever since it happened. Now I want to know if you can't drop it, and behave as if it hadn't occurred? I've apologised; it's for you to forgive.'

'If you wish me to behave as if it hadn't occurred, why will you persist in talking to me about it?' I asked.

'I talk to you about it because I want to hear you talk. I want to know what you have to say. You've been turning it over and over and over perpetually in your brain for the past five hours. You must have made up your mind to something, by this time. I want to know what. I want you to open your lips. I don't care what you say, only say it. Spit it out, instead of

swallowing it. It's this infernal silence that I can't stand. It frightens me. I don't know what you mayn't be meditating. I don't dare to leave you alone.'

'I have nothing to say to you, nothing whatever. I don't think it would give you any pleasure to hear what I think of you; I don't wish to expose myself to your violence again. At any rate, I will not stoop to recrimination with you. You know what has happened as well as I do. You understand the situation as well as I do. There is nothing to be said. It goes without saying.'

'Now listen to me for one moment, Monica. I have made up my mind to control myself, and to be very kind and patient with you. Therefore I shan't allow your stubbornness or your unfairness to anger me. I will just put it to you as from one reasonable being to another, whether we hadn't better talk

this thing out, and understand each other. You say you don't wish to expose yourself to my violence again. That's a petty and contemptible thing to say, and you ought to be ashamed of it. I've apologised for my violence, and it isn't very noble of you to taunt me with it. What's more, if you don't want me to be violent with you, don't bring it upon yourself by acting like a silly child, and making me forget that you're a woman. You say I wouldn't enjoy hearing your opinion of me. I say, yes, I would. No matter how uncomplimentary or unjust it may be, I'd infinitely rather hear you speak it out in plain words, than have you hold it in, and let it rankle and fester and poison our relations. Now, come. You see I'm calm and reasonable; try to be reasonable yourself. I don't understand how you can be so small. Anyone would suppose you had no more soul than a little tuppenny-

ha'penny shopkeeper's wife. I should think with your traditions you could be bigger, more generous. There, now; in all kindness, I beg you to talk it out. We never can take up our life again until we have talked this thing out, and come to an understanding.'

'There is nothing to talk out. There is nothing to understand. It is very easy for you to sit there and prate of patience and kindness and generosity. Is it kind or generous of you to force your presence upon me, here in my private rooms? I should think *you* might be patient, you who have all the advantages on your side. I have nothing to say to you, except to ask you to leave me. I do not think you would stay, if you could know how unwelcome you are.'

He coloured up. 'I see,' he cried. 'You want to exasperate me still more, so that

I shall say or do something else to give you an excuse for posing as an innocent, abused woman. *Your* private rooms, indeed! I think this house is mine, and that I can occupy any part of it I please, whenever I please, without asking you. *Your* private rooms! Why, damn it, you haven't a stitch of clothing on your back that doesn't belong to me. Yes, I see. You want to drive me to the point of making a brute of myself. But you can't do it. I've got myself in hand.'

'Oh, no,' I retorted, 'I don't think you could *make* a brute of yourself.'

'I thought you weren't going to stoop to recrimination?' he flung back.

For awhile after that we were both silent.

At last, 'Look here, Monica, is there no way by which you can be brought to your senses?' he asked. 'It stands to reason

that you've made your mind up to something. Anyhow, I can see that you have, by the set look in your face. Now, I want to know what. The least you can do is to tell me what. I think I am well within my rights when I ask to be informed what you mean to do.'

'I have not the faintest objection to telling you what I mean to do. Of course you must know that after what has happened to-day, I cannot mean to live in the same house with you any longer than I can help. I shall stay here to-night, and to-morrow I shall start with my maid for St.-Petersburg, to join my father.'

'By Jove, that shows what a thought-reader I am! Do you know, I suspected exactly that. I had a sort of presentiment that that was what you were meditating. But do you take me for a full-blown lunatic? Do you fancy for one instant that I will

allow it? Do you suppose I'm going to stand still, and let my wife abandon me, and make a scandal in the four corners of Europe? What do you suppose I married you for, if you're not to live with me? Oh, you must think I'm a fool!'

'I don't know what you married me for, I'm sure. Certainly, if you expected me to live with a man who was capable of beating me, you deceived yourself. I do not intend to expose myself to the risk of a repetition of to-day's experience. I shall leave you, and go to my father. As for your allowing or not allowing it, I don't see how you can prevent it.'

'Oh, you don't! Well, then you'd better invest in a pair of spectacles. I do. I see very clearly. I see several ways by which I can prevent it. I could lock you up here in your room, if it came to that. You mustn't allow yourself to forget that you

happen to be my wife, and that the law gives me considerable authority over you. But I think I know another way that will be more effective still. Beating you, indeed! You would go away from me, and tell people that I had beaten you, and spread the scandal of it far and wide. Poor defenceless thing, her husband maltreated her, and she had to fly from him, and seek refuge with her father! It takes a woman to pervert the truth like that, to lie like that. I struck you a little gentle blow on the cheek, so light a blow that it hasn't even left a mark; and now you talk of my having beaten you! You wouldn't hesitate to tell the world that I had beaten you! Yes, it takes a woman, a small-souled, mean-spirited woman. A man would be ashamed. No, no; I can't allow it. I couldn't allow you to leave me under any circumstances; but I must especially forbid it under the actual ones. You

must put your thoughts of flight out of your mind.'

'You asked me what I intended to do, and I have answered you. I have no desire to discuss it with you. Unless you do lock me up in my room—and I hardly think that you will take such an abject advantage of your superior strength as that—I shall not stay under your roof another day. I may be a mean-spirited woman, but I am not so mean-spirited as to go on living in the same house with a man who has insulted me as you have done to-day. I do not see why you should wish me to do so. You must know that there is no danger of my making public the indignity to which you have put me. If you are not ashamed of it, I am. All I ask is to be allowed to leave you, and go to my father. But, as I said, whether you allow it or not, I shall do it. That is all.'

'Oh, that's all, is it? You think that's all. Very good. Now listen to me. I'll speak very plainly to you for about half a minute, and then I'll give you complete liberty to do as you choose. I've just got one thing to say, and that is this. You pack up your traps, and call for your maid, and leave for St.-Petersburg, if you like; I won't stop you; only there's one fact you'd better bear in mind—before you reach the Russian frontier, your worthy father will be marching with a shaved head in the direction of Siberia. Don't allow yourself to forget that. As I imagine you have seen, I possess a rather considerable influence with the powers that be in my native land, and I hold, so to speak, the fate of your venerable parent at the points of my ten fingers. A word from me by telegraph would cause his arrest and transportation before he knew where he was standing.... Don't allow yourself

under any circumstances to forget what I'm telling you. You see, if you were amenable to reason in the ordinary way, I shouldn't find it necessary to go into these little details; but in the actual situation it strikes me as perhaps the only argument that will be likely to convince you. Just remember, whenever you feel in a rebellious mood, that I practically possess over your father the power of life and death.'

'What do you mean?' I cried in terror. 'What has my father done? What can you accuse him of? Oh, I don't believe a word you say. It is simply a threat.'

'Well, I'll tell you how you can test it, and find out to your perfect satisfaction whether it's simply a threat or not. Do what you said. Leave for St.-Petersburg to-morrow morning. And then, when you arrive there, inquire for your father's whereabouts. I fancy you'll find that he's departed

for our pretty little Asiatic colony of political damned fools.'

'Will you tell me what my father has done? What has he done, to place himself in such peril? What can you allege against him, to cause him to be arrested? What can you prove?'

'No, I won't tell you. It would tire me. All I'll say is this, that your father is not an incarnation of discretion, and that a very little indiscretion goes a long way in Russia. Then, you see, besides, I'm something of a power in Russia, and I had more or less to go bail for his good behaviour when I procured his pardon, and an accusation of any sort from me wouldn't need to be bolstered up with any very great amount of proof.'

'Very good. I shall warn my father. I shall tell him to leave Russia at once.'

'As you please, of course; but I wouldn't,

if I were you. You'd only succeed in making things unpleasant for him. I'm going to send a little telegram to St.-Petersburg to-night instructing certain people, upon whose obedience I can rely, to keep an eye upon your father's movements, and at the first sign of a disposition on his part to leave the country, to clap him into gaol.'

'Oh, I don't believe that you will do anything so base. What is the use, after all? Why should you object to letting me leave you? Why shouldn't you allow me to go to my father, for a visit? Why should you fear any scandal? What could be more natural than that I should go for a visit to my father? Nobody shall ever learn from me what has happened to-day. I promise you that. Why should you wish me to go on living in your house? We're utterly unsuited to each other. You can't be much happier in it than I am. It has all been a

mistake, — our marriage, — everything, — a terrible mistake. Why can't you let me go away ?'

'Why, because I love you so, my dear. Because your presence is a constant joy to me. Because, so long as I can see you every day, and woo you, I can hope to win you ; whereas, if you were away from me, you might forget me ; I might lose what little ground I have gained.'

He looked at me with eyes that made my blood run cold ; and the inflexion of his voice sent a shudder through me.

'Come !' he said, stretching out his arms. 'We'll say no more about it. Let's kiss and make up.'

I shrank away from him, and tried to suppress a tremor in my voice as I answered, 'Yes, I quite agree with you. We'll say no more about it. We have said as much as is at all necessary. Will you be

good enough to leave me now? I'm very tired.'

He took a quick step forward, and caught me in his arms. Then he began to kiss me, on the cheeks and on the forehead. I put up my hands, and covered my lips.

'Oh, how cold you are!' he complained. 'What are you made of? Not flesh and blood, I'll be bound!... Oh, yes, I'll leave you now. Only, remember what I have told you. I meant it, every word of it. Your father's liberty depends upon a nod from me, and it is altogether at your option whether I shall give that nod or not. Good-night.'

That explains why I could not separate from the Prince, why I had to go on living with him, insupportable as our life together had become.

III.

After that things went steadily from bad to worse between us, and from worse to worst. It is a miserable story, sordid and disgraceful in all its aspects; it makes my cheeks tingle with shame to think of telling it; and I shall tell no more of it than I must. Sometimes, when I reflect upon it, it seems as if it had been all my fault, or chiefly my fault, at least; but at other times I feel that it was inevitable from the beginning,—that nothing else could possibly have resulted from such a wretchedly unnatural and ill-assorted marriage.

At first, for a while, it was evident that

Prince Léonticheff desired and hoped for a reconciliation. He made no absolute overtures for one, but his speech, his bearing, everything, showed that he desired one. I, however, not only would not, I could not meet him half way. A deep sense of resentment towards him, a violent dread and loathing of him, had got kindled in my heart. Quite without reference to my will, they burned hotter and fiercer as time went on, instead of cooling and dying out.

The trouble was that every day fresh fuel was added to them, because I had to live with him. If he had allowed me to leave him, and go to my father, I dare say it would have been different. But by the employment of means that seemed to me cruel and cowardly to the last degree, he had compelled me to remain with him. He held my father as a hostage! That constraint, that annihilation of my personal

liberty, and the method of it, stung me with a furious sense of outrage and injustice. And then, joined to that, my constant feeling of his nearness to me, my consciousness that I was living in his house and on his bounty, the necessity I was under frequently to meet him, speak with him, listen to him, were like continual reopenings of the wound, which kept it sore.

Was it my fault? or was it inevitable?

Perhaps it was both. It was the fault of my temperament, of my character, no doubt; but then, my temperament and my character were entailed upon me, and I could no more help them than I could help the colour of my hair.

At all events, as I have said, things went steadily from bad to worse with us. Steadily my hatred of him seemed to grow bitterer and more violent, rankling deep in my heart with an intensity of pain that was almost

physical. I cannot express the sick abhorrence that filled me and chilled me when I thought of him, not the thrill of fear and repulsion that I experienced when I would hear his voice or his footstep, or when I would see his face.

Yes; if he would only have consented to let me go away from him, I am sure it would have been different. But the thought that by an intimidation more galling, more humiliating, and more efficacious than main force, I was compelled to live with him in spite of myself, was like a constant irritating thorn in my brain; and our daily meetings were like daily thrustings of the thorn in deeper still. It came to the point where I could not look at him, but my hatred burned in my eyes; where I could not speak to him, but it vibrated in my voice. And then, my knowledge of its hopelessness...! That it must go on and on like this for ever!

Until I died, unless . . . unless he died first! That no escape from it was imaginable, except in the death of one of us! It was all very wrong and terrible, but if I am to tell the truth, I must tell it: again and again I caught myself saying to myself, 'Oh, I wish that he was dead! There is no hope possible for me so long as he lives. Oh, I wish that he was dead!'

It was the first season I had ever passed in London, that summer of 1886. Of course we were very busy, going and receiving. I was presented at the next drawing-room held after our arrival; then followed a breathless whirl of dinners and dances, routs, rowdies, theatricals, I know not what all. For a while, as I have said, Prince Léonticheff's attitude towards me was tacitly conciliatory; but gradually, as he saw no sign of relenting on my part, his patience began to fail; it was plain that he was grow-

ing angry and angrier; till, finally, so to speak, the air between us became heavy with suppressed ill-feeling, and I lived in perpetual terror of an explosion.

At last, one night towards the end of June, the explosion came. We had given a dinner, and a reception after it. Then, when our guests had gone, and I was about to retire to my own apartments, he said, 'I should like a few minutes' talk with you. Come into the library.'

In the library he announced, 'I am leaving London in the morning, to go to Russia. It appears that malignant typhus has broken out in the south-east, among my peasantry, and they are dying by the hundreds. I'm going down there to see what it is like. I shall probably send some letters about it to the *Beacon*. I shall leave in the morning, before you are awake.'

He paused, and waited in manifest ex-

pectation that I would say something to show admiration of his courage, or concern for the danger to which he was about to expose himself. But, — to my shame, perhaps, it should be acknowledged, — the only thought or feeling that his announcement aroused in me was one of relief at the prospect of a period of separation from him. He waited for me to speak until the silence became painful, when, very tactlessly, I asked, 'How long will you be away?'

He looked at me with a smile that was grim and contemptuous, nodding his head. At the end of a minute he uttered a dry little laugh.

'Ha! That's just what I expected. I tell you that I am going to a pestilence region, carrying my life in my hands; and all you have to say is, how long shall I be gone? ... That's the only aspect of the

affair that interests my wife. Well, I shall be gone about a month. Perhaps a little longer, perhaps not quite so long. We are engaged for a cruise on the *Tchernobog* in August, and I shall of course be back in time to start on that. I'll keep you informed of my movements by telegraph.'

'And you wish me to stay on here in Salchester House?' I queried, more for the sake of saying something than because I had any doubt or curiosity.

'Why, I don't see but that you'll have to. We've invited people for a good many evenings ahead, and we've accepted a good many invitations. I don't see but you will have to stay here to do the honours.'

'Yes, of course,' I assented.

For several minutes neither of us spoke.

At length I rose, as if to withdraw, and asked, 'Is that all?'

'Well, as I told you, I shall leave in the

morning without seeing you. This is the last occasion we shall have to talk together till I come back. If you have anything to say to me, you'd better say it now.'

'I have nothing to say to you.'

Again there was a minute of silence. I did not look at him, but somehow I knew that he had coloured with anger, and that his eyes were fixed with no friendly gaze upon my face. Presently, still without looking at him, I began to move towards the door. Just as I had got my hand upon the knob of it. . .

'Come back here!' he cried out.

Each word was short, loud, sudden, and big with passion. The sound of them struck me like a blow. I stood still, trembling, but I did not take my hand from the door-knob, nor turn around.

'Let go that door-knob, and come back here,' he cried again.

Then, as I still did not move, 'Do you hear?' he screamed.

But I had no power to obey him. I was transfixed to the spot by fright.

Next moment he grasped my arms, dragged me back into the room, and half pushed, half flung, me into a chair.

'Now, then, you may just sit there till I tell you to get up,' he said.

His face was terrible, purple and swollen with congested blood. His eyes were lowering and vicious, and he kept them half closed as he looked at me.

'By God! I wish a stranger could be present to see the way you carry yourself towards me,' he said. 'He'd wonder at my patience. He'd wonder I didn't kill you.'

He strode backwards and forwards through the room for a bit, then came to a halt before me.

'You may have nothing to say to me,' he

went on, 'but I have something to say to you, and I'll thank you to give me your attention while I say it.'

He drew up a chair, and sat down, facing me, with his knees touching mine.

'Now,' he said, 'I called you in here to-night, not only to tell you that I was going to Russia, but also because I wanted to give you a chance, before I went, to apologise to me for the manner in which you've seen fit to demean yourself ever since that day in the train coming from Nice. I've stood your damned airs and nonsense just as long as I intend to. Now you may beg my pardon, and mend your ways. Or else, by God, I'll make you repent it! There's a limit even to my good nature, and you've reached it. Now you may open your mouth and talk. I don't intend to let you sulk and mope about this house any longer.'

'What do you wish me to apologise

for?' I queried. 'Do you wish me to beg pardon for the blow you struck me in the train?'

He sprang to his feet in a fury, and shook his fist at me.

'You petty-minded, mean-spirited shrew!' he cried. 'Good heavens, how can any human being, with human blood in her veins, nurse and cherish rancour as she does! It takes a little contemptible penny-counting school-mistress, by Jove, to be as small as that! Oh, good God, why did I ever lift you out of the squalor in which I found you, to make a lady of you, you who have the soul of a fish-wife? I'll just give you one piece of advice, however, and you'd better bear it in mind. Don't you throw that incident in the railway carriage in my teeth again, don't you taunt me with it again, or I'll repeat it with compound interest.'

'Brute!' I muttered. In my anger, the

word came out independently of any volition on my part.

'Hold your tongue,' he shouted. 'If you take to calling names, I may meet you and beat you on your own ground. Now what I have to say to you is this. Hitherto I've been your friend; I've put up with your moods and your tantrums, and borne your insults, and done everything that a friend could do to smooth your path for you, and make you comfortable and contented. But now you've gone too far. From this night on, you may count me as your enemy. Look out for me. You hate me. Well, I'll return the compliment henceforward, and hate you. Look out for me. You've spurned my love till you've tired it out. Now beware of my hatred. I tell you, until you come to me grovelling on your knees and licking the dust at my feet, and fawn like a dog to be taken back in my good

graces, you'd better be on your guard. You've gone too far; you drive me to take reprisals. You'll find that I'm a good hater.'

'Thank you,' I replied. 'I much prefer your hatred to what you call your love. It is not quite so loathsome.'

'So? Ah, well, time will show. I think your opinion on that score will be more valuable a year hence than it is at present. I think I can lead you a dance. I will pay you back in your own coin, and I'll pay you a sovereign for your every shilling. The fun of it all is, of course, that you'll have to be entirely submissive, and to do everything pretty much as I wish you to, because you must never allow yourself to forget that I hold your father's fate in my hands as a sort of bond or guarantee for your good behaviour. That's what makes the situation pretty. The circumstance that your father will have to suffer for any little sins of yours,

will doubtless have the effect of keeping you within bounds.'

'You coward!' I said between my teeth.

'Faugh! You ——!' he retorted; I cannot repeat his word. He spat into my face.

It all seems very petty and contemptible, I suppose, and unworthy of being recorded. But at the time it was of the utmost hideous seriousness to me,—to us, perhaps I ought to say,—and I record it as part of the explanation of the unquestionably grave events that ultimately followed.

Up to this point, I think I have been able, in telling my story, to take a reasonably impartial view of it,—to make allowances for Prince Léonticheff, and to recognise my own share of the blame. But beyond this point I cannot do so. When I think of the things that happened during the next four years, my heart burns again with rage and mortification,

I hate him again with as great intensity as if he were still visible before me in the flesh, and I cannot help thinking that it was all his fault, all, all his fault. Because he forced me to live with him! Why could he not have allowed me to go away? Then the things that I must recount would never have come to pass; separated, we could have lived our own lives in peace. But he forced me to live with him. Why? He must have known that I could never forgive him his last outrage; that, after that, all possibility of reconciliation between us was destroyed. And yet he forced me to go on living with him, so that every circumstance of my life operated to keep my wound open; every circumstance and condition of my life served to remind me of my grievance. He forced me to live with him; and I cannot see but he alone was responsible for the consequences of his doing so. I believe his reason for so forcing me

was simply this: I had worn out his patience, I had angered him profoundly, he had come to reciprocate my hatred, and now he wished to have me constantly in his house, constantly under his hand, so that he might, as he had said, take reprisals; he forced me to live with him so that he might torture me, and thus taste the sweetness of revenge. Of course, when it is a question of the motives of so unusual a person as Prince Léonticheff, I may possibly be mistaken; but I have thought and thought, and that is the only theory of his conduct which seems to me to explain it.

But if I had hated him before, conceive how I hated him now! Now that it had come to open war; now that in cold blood he had determined to 'lead me a dance!' With a hatred that was all the more hot and furious, because it was impotent and dumb,—because there was nothing it could say or do to satisfy

itself. Here I was, compelled to live with him; compelled to live with this great coarse hulking red-faced boor and bully; compelled to pass my life in his company, to eat at the same table with him, to travel with him, to be his property, his slave, his thing; to sacrifice all privacy to him, to hold myself in constant readiness for his commands, to come when he called, to submit to his every appetite or caprice; compelled to play the wife, the wife, to this man who had struck me, who had spat upon my face, who had crushed and outraged every instinct of pride, of sensitiveness, of self-respect, that I possessed! I was constrained to live and move and have my being in an atmosphere that was poisoned for me by his presence. The mere sight of him, the mere thought of him, made me recoil and shudder and grow sick at heart; the mere sound of his voice filled me with dismay; and yet I was his wife, he owned me, I had to

live with him! Is it wonderful that my hatred of him gained in virulence? There was nothing I could do to escape him, nothing I could do to disarm him, I was completely, absolutely, in his power, at his mercy; utterly helpless to defend or to avenge myself. How could I help hating him with increasing fierceness? Of course, of course, my hatred was an evil thing, evil and shameful; I do not mean to justify it or excuse it; what I do mean is that it was also an inevitable thing, and not a thing for which I was responsible; I mean that I could not help it, that, evil as it was, I could no more help it than I could have helped falling sick of a fever if I had been exposed to contagion, than I could have helped bleeding if he had cut my flesh with a knife. And I mean, too, that it was a thing of his own making; that he kept my hatred alive by daily feeding it, that every day he injected a fresh supply of its poison into my

blood. If he had allowed me to live away from him, I should not have hated him; I might even perhaps have forgotten what he had made me suffer, and have forgiven him.

What he *had* made me suffer! It had seemed a good deal at the time; but it was nothing, nothing, to what he made me suffer now. It is needless that I should tell the story in detail. I shall say enough when I say that he seemed to bring all his powers of invention upon the task he had set himself, the task of 'leading me a dance;' the task of annoying me, humiliating me, hurting me. He had come to hate me; that was not to be wondered at; we were mutually antipathetic; and his hatred of me was as natural as my hatred of him. But there was this difference; he had the upper hand; he could wreak his hatred upon me; and he did not neglect to do so. 'You will find that I am a good hater,'

he had warned me; his warning proved to be quite true.

Certain of the measures that he took to the end of causing me pain, were, however, rather ineffectual. I suppose I had become dulled and hardened; at all events, I did not mind especially when he would bring one of his mistresses to stay in the house, and force me to do the honours to her, abusing me in her presence, and making love to her in mine; I could not take that sort of thing very tragically, it was too despicable, it was beneath contempt. I did not mind especially, either, when he would set one of his male parasites on to make love to me. What I suffered most from was the general necessity I was under to live with him, and the sense of isolation and defencelessness that it engendered; the feeling that my life was being stolen from me and wasted, a waste as hopeless as it was purposeless, 'like water spilled

upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again;' and the loss of self-respect that must befall any one who is conscious of leading an empty, useless life,—the humiliation, the despair. After that, the thing I suffered most from was his talk. I can give no idea how nauseous it was. He let himself go; and in my presence, and sometimes in my presence and in that of others as well, he would say things so impossible in their vileness that I cannot write them down, so incredible in their vileness that I cannot conceive a human being even thinking them in the silence of his own brain, much less giving them utterance before a woman. Some Russians are said to be like that. He appeared to derive an exquisite satisfaction from the spectacle of the horror and disgust he contrived thus to inspire in me, and to enjoy keenly my inability to silence him, or to leave his presence. Among other things,

he wrote a set of verses—oh, but a set of verses!—in the Russian language. Then, one day, when he and I were lunching together *en tête-à-tête*, he insisted upon reading them aloud to me, in the hearing of the servants. Of course the servants were English, and did not understand a syllable of Russian; but that fact did not mitigate the miserable shame and sickness that I felt. At this moment the coarse brutal laughter with which he punctuated his reading, seems to vibrate again in my ears.

But I cannot dwell on this; the mere memory of it is too painful. From his talk I think I suffered more even than from his blows, though whenever he became particularly angry with me now, he did not hesitate to cuff or kick me. At the time, a blow from him would infuriate me far more than a word; on a hundred occasions, when he struck me, if I had had a weapon, and if I

had been his equal in physical strength, I do not doubt I would have killed him; but looking upon it all from this distance, I find myself forgetting the blows, whereas the words come back to me with the same venomous force they had when they were spoken... And always, always, he held over my head that threat of sending my father to Siberia, to tame we with, he said, when I manifested a rebellious spirit.

So I may pass over four years, and come to the spring of 1890, when again we were in London, at Salchester House. As I have said, a few days after our arrival he went away, not telling me where he was going, but promising to be gone a fortnight or three weeks.

PART V.

ARMIDIS.

I.

Amongst all the people whom I knew in London, there was no one I liked better than Miss Clotilde Wynn, the poet, who lived in Kensington Gore, in a house whose windows overlooked the Park. A few days after Prince Léonticheff's departure, I went to her in the afternoon for a cup of tea. Whilst we were talking together I began to notice a little water-colour drawing, in a passepartout frame, that stood on a table at my side. It represented the head and shoulders of a young man, twenty years old perhaps, with a thick, waving mane of brown hair, and a face of such unusual and exquisite

beauty that I supposed it must be a fancy-sketch, the translation of a painter's ideal, and not a veritable portrait. Yet something in it, I could not tell what, teased me with a sense of familiarity, until, all at once, I exclaimed, 'Why, that is just how Armidis must have looked thirty years ago. Armidis the composer.'

'Why, but it is Armidis!' cried Miss Wynn. 'Do you know him?'

I answered that he was one of my best and dearest friends.

'And one of mine, too,' said she. 'I knew him when I was a girl. Have you seen him lately?'

'I have not seen him since my marriage,—four years ago.'

'Why, but you know he is in town, of course?'

'No? I had not known it. Is it true? If it is, nothing, nothing could give me

greater happiness than to see him. What is his address? I will write to him. It is strange he has not come to call on me. He must have known I was here.'

'He has been living in London about a year. I see a good deal of him. He drops in to drink a cup of tea three or four times a week. You know I go out very little. Indeed, he said he was coming this afternoon; but I don't know that that is any reason for expecting him.'

'Oh, I hope he will, I hope he will,' I said. My heart was trembling. The prospect of seeing him, though it was altogether a pleasant one, agitated me very much.

'But, my dear, you are pale,' cried Miss Wynn. 'There's a history. Tell it to me at once.'

'No, there is no history. Only I saw a great deal of him when I was a girl in Paris. He was kind to me, and I was fond of him.

And now, the thought of seeing him, it is so sudden and unexpected,—you can understand . . .'

A servant entered, and announced, 'Mr. Armidis.'

Next moment Armidis himself, his face all smiles, and both of his fat hands extended, was bearing down upon us.

I was standing with my back towards the window, so that he could not have recognised me. At the sight of him, the tears sprang to my eyes; I could not help it; I was weeping in silence while he made his obeisance to the lady of the house.

Then Miss Wynn said, with a travesty of ceremoniousness, 'I wish to present you to her Serene Highness the Princess Léonticheff. I think you have had the honour before.'

Armidis gave a little start, and slowly turned his face towards me. All the colour

and all the sparkle had faded from it. It was white and grave and questioning. I still stood with my back to the window, so that my own face was always in shadow.

He did not speak for a minute. At last he said very low, 'Not Monica?'

'Yes, Monica,' I answered, also very low, and impulsively I moved towards him.

'Monica!' he repeated; it was like a sob.

'Aren't you going to shake hands with me?' I asked, putting out both of mine, and trying to smile down my tears.

'Oh, my child!' The words were scarcely audible. He took my hands, and held me off, and looked into my face with eyes that were eloquent of his emotion. By and by he drew a long breath, like a sigh; and his eyes became radiant with one of his bright, beautiful smiles; and, 'There, there! Dry your tears,' he said. 'The awful moment

has passed; and now we may be quite commonplace and friendly again. I knew you were in London; I saw your arrival noted in the newspapers. Distinguished personage! But it hadn't occurred to me that we might meet. I, poor Bohemian, I am not of your world, you know.'

'I think you might have come to see me,' I said.

'I didn't dare. Park Lane is so grand. Besides, discretion is the better part of friendship; and though I knew you in your old earth-bound existence, I didn't want to haunt you in your present state of exaltation. I feel that I must be something like a ghost in your eyes.'

'A most welcome one, and, fortunately, most substantial.'

'Oh, now, how unkind of you! Why not tell me outright that I'm shamefully fat, and have done with it? Most substantial!...

This lady,' he announced, addressing Miss Wynn, 'this lady and I were children together in Paris, a hundred years ago. Then she went off and got married, and we haven't seen each other since. Hence our tears.'

With that, the talk became general, and remained so, until, at the end of an hour, Armidis rose to go. I followed his example, and we took leave of Miss Wynn together.

My carriage was waiting at the door in the street.

'Get in,' I said. 'You must come home with me. You must dine with me. You don't seem at all glad to see me. I . . . for me, it is the happiest moment I have known for four years.'

'My dear, dear child,' he returned, 'I am so glad to see you—this meeting, all unforeseen, has moved me so deeply—I have quite lost my head. I have had to be

matter-of-fact and nonchalant about it—you must let me be so a little longer—lest I should become incoherent.'

'Very good. I will forgive you everything and anything, if you will only be nice now, and come home with me, and stay till I bid you depart.'

'Ah, yes, I should like to above all things. But...'

'But...?' I prompted, as he paused.

'But—your prince?'

'Oh, he is away. He is out of town.'

'Then I will come. Though, I confess, my feet will burn when I cross his threshold, and, if I eat of his salt, it will give me an indigestion.'

We drove through the Park, already thronged with carriages, though the Season was but just beginning.

I think we were both of us still rather embarrassed. We had not recovered yet

from the suddenness of our encounter, and the excess of our emotion. We found it hard to talk; and it was with an evident determination to say something, no matter what, that Armidis began to speak of Miss Wynn.

'What a nice creature that Clotilde is!' he exclaimed. 'And she's written some extremely pretty verses. There's one thing I want you to explain to me. Why, with her wit, her beauty, and her wealth, why is she still a spinster, at the age of forty? How has she contrived to avoid the pitfall of matrimony? You were no prettier than she, you were poor, you weren't half so clever. And yet . . .!'

'Yes. If I had only been half so clever, perhaps it wouldn't have happened.'

'But you had my cleverness quite at your service.'

'The longer I live, the more I come to

realise that we can't profit by the wisdom or the experience of others. We have to learn our own lessons, fight our own battles, alone and unaided.'

'That sounds very deep, my dear, but it only means that we have to live our own lives. If it were otherwise, God might have stopped with Eve and Adam. It is the fact that after all we are infinitely individual, infinitely isolated from each other, that makes life interesting, and helps to make it worth while. Our souls are like stars gravitating millions of miles apart in space: we mingle our light a little, we describe orbits around one another, but we never touch.'

'I don't see how life is worth while in any case. It may be interesting, like any other tragedy; but worth while...! Is it worth while to suffer, without an object for our suffering? Yet that is what we have to

do. We are told that we are born to trouble, which is bad enough. But to be born to aimless trouble . . . !'

'Oh, dear, me! What a pessimist we are! Shocking!'

'Aren't you a pessimist? I thought all wise men were pessimists.'

'A pessimist? I? When there are peaches and sunshine in the world! Fie!'

'Well, I am glad to see one thing,' said I: 'you are always Armidis.'

'Am I? Really? Oh, I'm so relieved to be assured of that. I'm often dubious of my own identity. To hear a disinterested third person vouch for it is such a comfort. And àpropos of that, tell me, tell me truly, are you always Monica?'

'I have every reason to believe so. Why?'

'Because, if you are, I think I can impart a little information to you, that will mitigate

your pessimism somewhat, and perhaps convert you to the faith that it is rather worth while, after all.'

'What is it? Tell me, quick.'

Armidis turned his full face upon me, and held my eyes for a moment with a smiling, studious, mystifying gaze.

At last he said, 'He is in London.'

'He?' I repeated. 'Who?'

'He? Who? Behold the dreadful soul of woman! He? Who? Or is it only affectation? Hypocrite! Of old there was but one He for you. Don't tell me that to-day there are many.'

'Oh!' I gasped, as his meaning struck me; and I sank back in my place all in a tremor.

'Or rather, he isn't in London,' he pursued. 'But it's the same thing. He's somewhere down on the south coast. But he has a studio here, in Chelsea; and he's

coming up to town in a day or two. So there!'

'Don't, don't,' I begged.

There were a thousand questions I wanted to ask; but I had not the strength to pursue the subject; it was like suddenly uncovering the quick. I closed my eyes; and for two or three minutes neither of us spoke. Then we drew up at Salchester House.

II.

I LED him to my boudoir.

'There are so many things I can't understand,' said he. 'Of course I know it's none of my business, and you may snub me to your heart's content. But we can't play at mere acquaintanceship, you and I; we've tried, and it's been a failure. It must be all or nothing: close confederates, as we were in the old days, or strangers. I know so much, and I understand so little. I know, for instance, that he beats you. I know that every day, in every way, he defiles and outrages every finer instinct of your being. I know that he seeks to crush your in-

dividuality, to deprive you of all personal liberty, to reduce you to the condition of his mere thing and chattel. But what I don't know, what I can't understand, is why you submit to it, why you continue to live with him. I have waited and waited, from day to day, from year to year, to hear that you had left him. I have been nonplussed, amazed, horrified even, at your not doing so. I have conjectured about it in vain. Now if you love me, if you care for my love, explain it to me. What price does he pay you? Don't tell me it is the mere material advantage of your position, or the rank. I shouldn't believe that.'

'How do you know these things?' I cried in consternation. 'How do you know he beats me? Do you mean to say that it is common talk?'

'Common talk? I can't tell you whether it is common talk or not. I am not of your

world, and you are not of mine. But one night,—yes. I was at a club. I chanced to overhear three words dropped by a man who had been dining here with you and him. Only three words; but they were enough. Just as the naturalist, finding the claw of an antediluvian beast, will build up from it a truthful image of the whole animal, so I, from those few words, built for myself a model of your domestic situation. But I had known it all before, I had suspected, I had divined, it all; these words merely confirmed me in my belief. How do I know that three and two make five? I am acquainted with you to some small extent, and I am not entirely ignorant of the character of your Prince. You are an obstinate, opinionated little person, Monica, and he is a slightly impulsive man. In the course of nature you would necessarily irritate him a good deal, and he would

instinctively resort to his fists. Oh, I know; I know everything; I know by intuition and inference.'

He drew his chair up close to me, and took my hands, and looked into my eyes.

'It's this way, my dear,' he said. 'You see, I love you. If you were my own daughter, I could not love you better than I do. And love of this sort is very far from blind. It is like a spur to the imagination. I know you and I know Léonticheff; therefore I know, I can guess, the whole sorry story. Ah, if there were but some way in which I could help you, shield you, make it easier for you! That is the thought, the wish, that has never left me since your marriage. Daily I have said to myself, "She is far away, alone with him, alone with Léonticheff, utterly at his mercy, alone and suffering. And,"—you remember Capponsacchi?—"here am I, 'with a whole

store of strengths, eating into my heart, craving employ; and she perhaps in need of a finger's help; and yet there is no way in the whole world to stretch out mine, and so relieve myself!'" Yes, it is a good deal as you said: we have to fight our own battles alone and unaided. But why don't you leave him? Where is your self-respect, your pride, your spirit? How can you go on eating at the table, living in the house, sharing the luxuries, of a man who degrades you so? I cannot understand it.'

'Oh, it's simple enough,' said I, laughing a little, nervously. 'He holds my father as a hostage, as a bond and guarantee for my good behaviour. Whether my father has done anything or not, I don't know. But the Prince warns me that if I leave him, he will cause my father to be arrested and transported to Siberia. He has my father watched constantly, so that he may

not, at a possible hint from me, quit the country. He gave us a proof of his power and influence in Russia, when he procured my father's pardon. I don't dare to move. He would be sure to make good his threat.'

'But—but he? What is his motive in all this? I should think, by this time, he too would desire a separation. Does he enjoy it? Is domestic infelicity like nectar in his cup?'

'Oh, don't ask me. I can't undertake to explain Prince Léonticheff. Or, rather, I dare say, the explanation is simply this: he regards me as a piece of property which he has bought and paid for, and he doesn't intend to let any of his property slip between his fingers. Then, I suspect, he finds it convenient to have a scapegoat constantly at hand, some one upon whom he can vent his spleen when the world is out of tune for him. Furthermore, is it not said that

revenge is sweet? He feels that he has a grievance against me, in that I don't adore him, and he likes to keep me within reach, so that, by daily little applications of the torture, he may avenge himself.'

'It is terrible, terrible,' said Armidis; 'but the most terrible thing of all is the tone in which you speak of it.'

'Oh,' I cried, 'it is a horrid, dark, sickening coil. Don't pry into it.'

'Ah, that is better. Speak seriously and feelingly about it. Your cynicism made my flesh creep. Then it is a condition of things that can only end with the death of one of you. I believe I should do you a kindness if I killed you.'

'Thank you. I should very much prefer it if you would kill him.'

'Oh, don't, don't, Monica,' he groaned. 'There are things which, in a case like this, you shouldn't say even to me, you shouldn't

say even in jest. Besides, I don't like to feel that you *can* jest about it, no matter how bitterly. It seems somehow sacrilegious. It is too grimly, awfully serious.'

'Yes, it's pretty serious,' I admitted. 'I don't mean to jest about it. But if I speak about it too seriously, I shall go into hysterics, or something. Oh, you can never know how miserable I am, or how I hate him.'

After a long pause, Armidis said, 'I told you that Julian North is in London,—that he has a studio in Chelsea.'

'Yes . . .' I responded.

My temples began to throb, and something caught in my throat, and made it tingle. He had come back to the subject that had not left my mind since he had first introduced it, which I longed to hear him speak of, and yet which I could not help dreading and shrinking from, as I

would dread and shrink from the touch of a knife.

'And you do not ask me a single question about him!' cried Armidis. 'I should think you would be interested to hear my news of him. If only for old sake's sake! Or is your indifference merely feigned? Hypocrite!'

'What do you wish me to ask?' I questioned.

My voice sounded faint and thin to me, and my heart trembled so!

'Well, for instance, you might ask how he is getting on.'

'Well, tell me then, how is he getting on?'... Oh, such a strange, painful, sinking feeling within me!

'He is getting on famously. He is becoming the fashion. He has been here less than a year, and already he is distinctly a success. Portraits, you know; portraits of the aristo-

cracy. He's immensely clever; he has improved wonderfully in his technique.'

'I am delighted to hear it. Of course I knew he was bound to succeed sooner or later. Do you . . .' My voice failed me; I had to pause and recover it. . . . 'Do you see much of him?'

'Oh, a little, a little, some thirty-six hours in every twenty-four. That is to say, he has adopted me. We share a house together. A house, if you please, no mere beggarly bachelor chambers. Oh, we're domesticity incarnate. We have a cook and a maidservant and a manservant, and we're extremely smart. I wear his old clothes, and he profits by my experience, if you'll admit that to be possible for the nonce. We have a monstrous fine studio, wherein he paints by day, and I compose by night: a sort of æsthetic Box and Cox arrangement. We give the nicest little afternoon teas every

Wednesday, and if you're very good, perhaps I will procure you a card. Miss Wynn comes. We live in Church Street, and just around the corner from us is the home of that gentleman whom Julian designates as the greatest painter of all time, and with whose acquaintance we are honoured. Environment! It is everything. We paint, and compose, and sing our songs, and exhibit our pictures, and are altogether to be envied. Just at present, as I told you, my painter is out of town, and I'm disconsolate. He's a most aquatic beast, amphibious, and he's fled to the south coast for a watery week or two. Have you been to the Academy yet? The Grosvenor? You must go. We have a lot of portraits. One of myself that's just too pretty for anything. And what a crowd we had Show-Sunday! Celebrities! Nobilities! Everything short of Royalties, and they'll have to come to us

in time, or the throne will lose its prestige. Oh, he's a good lad, is Julian; but not so young as when you knew him. Let me see.... I fancy he's about one-and-thirty, and old for his age. You see, he has suffered a good deal,—*histoire de femme.* And you will be twenty-nine? Not so?'

'Yes, twenty-nine.'

'Your indifference puzzled me and troubled me at first, Monica, but now I've come to like it. I like it because it's so transparent. At first it struck me as opaque, and I hate indifference when it is opaque; but now I can see through it like a glass. I perceive a hundred questions trembling unspoken on your lips; that's right; let them remain tacit. I will answer them. First, then, yes, I mean it, he has suffered a good deal, on account of a certain woman. But we'll leave that for the moment, to return to it later. Secondly, no, we don't talk of that woman

very often. When we first met, now some eleven months ago, we talked of nothing else for a while: until, that is, he thought he had pumped from me all the information concerning her that I would yield. Then, little by little, we dropped the subject. We found it, if you must know, too painful. It interfered with our work, it destroyed our repose of mind. No, I have never told him that her husband was a brute, whom they had compelled her to marry against her will; I regarded my knowledge of that fact as in a sense privileged and confidential. Whatever he knows of the quality and savour of her Prince, he has gathered from other lips than mine. Yes, it is very rarely nowadays that we mention her. Poor youth, he has never been able to forget, and it's always therefore a sore subject with him. Has he explained his silence to me, that criminal silence, which was, when all is said, the cause of the evil

that followed? To be sure he has; and it was just as I had supposed. He was permitted to write to the lady in question once a month, and then only such cool conventional letters as her father might with propriety look over. Well, one day, when the time for writing his monthly letter had come round, he found himself in the deepest depths of melancholy and discouragement. Everything had gone wrong with him; he had no money; he had pawned his last pawnable possession; what was worse, he could not work, and he believed that he had lost his talent; he believed that his hand had forgot her cunning. He was lonesome, he was in despair, and he was hungry. Then he thought, "What is the use of my writing to her? It's a hopeless case. It never can come to anything. I, who haven't the price of a dinner in my pocket, what right have I to keep her reminded of me? If I have any

sentiment of honour in my heart, I must help her to forget me. I must efface myself. I must not write to her any more"... Of course he was insane: one of those periodic attacks of dementia to which all artists are subject. Insane, or worse; I plead insanity, because, if he was in his sound mind, then there's no excuse for him. Well, he remained insane for some time, some weeks or months. Meanwhile, two or three letters had come to him from her; and he—the young maniac!—what do you suppose he had done with them? He had burned them, without opening them! He said he felt that under the circumstances, and in view of the resolution he had taken, he had no right to read them! Quixote! Then, with the lapse of time, he recovered his wits, his insanity slipped from him like a foul garment, he was himself again, and—he realised what he had done; he realised what an idiot he

had been, and what a knave; and overcome by remorse for his conduct, and by terror of its possible consequences, he sat down and began to write her a letter, explaining his silence, and craving her forgiveness. He had written perhaps half a dozen lines, when he was interrupted by the arrival of the postman, the letter-carrier. This functionary handed him a note, a short, polite little note, from a certain Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin.... "It is my wish, and it is the wish of my daughter," said Banakin, "that all further relations between you and her, and all correspondence, should cease!" This note, curiously enough, was dated in June, 1885,—just about the time when the huge figure of a certain Russian Prince first loomed up on our horizon in Paris! Clever father! Well, so Julian said to himself, "That ends it;" and he never finished his letter; and the worst befell....

All this while, if you please, he was having the devil's own struggle of it for a living. He was grubbing along within a hair's breadth of downright starvation, and that sort of thing. But by and by he sold a picture; and then another. Orders for portraits began to come in. All at once, to cut a long story short, he woke up to the fact that he had a comfortable sum of money in his pocket, and was by way of earning a decent income. Then, suddenly, in his bosom Hope revived. He thought to himself, "Perhaps she is still there. Perhaps she still remembers me. Perhaps, now that I am no longer a pauper, her father will be willing to consider me." Whereupon he shut up his studio, packed his portmanteau, and sailed for Liverpool. And from Liverpool he hastened to London. And the first man he met in the streets of London was no other than poor old Armidis, the composer.

And he told Armidis that he was on his way to Paris, to look up the Banakins, and to sue once more for the hand of Monica Paulovna. And Armidis laughed in his face, and made answer, "Oh, simple youth! 'Tis now five years or thereabouts, since she has seen you; and do you imagine for one instant that she has remained constant? Little do you know of the heart of woman. Go to! She wouldn't look at the likes of you. She has become a pillar of the high church of the World, the bride of a Prince, the pearl of the superior noblesse of Russia!"... With which he and Armidis put their heads together, and took a house in Chelsea, a house with a garden and a studio. And Julian settled down in a dogged, desperate way to work, and all at once he found himself the fashion. Perhaps Armidis procured him his first few orders, but after that the intrinsic excellence of his work carried him along. Would

Madame la Princesse like to have her portrait painted? In the best style, and at moderate cost? We should be proud to receive her commands.'

'Oh, talk of something else . . . please,' I cried.

I could not bear it any longer, this talk of Julian. It touched too deep, too sensitive a spot. It held me spell-bound, but the joy it gave me was too keen, so keen that it hurt and exhausted me. I cried out to him to talk of something else, though there was no other subject in the world which, at that moment, had the least interest for me.

'Of something else?' he queried. 'Of what?'

'Oh, anything. Of yourself. Tell me what you have been doing lately. I read somewhere that you had written an opera. Is it so?'

'Oh, how kind and condescending of you!

To interest yourself in my poor affairs! . . . Yes, I believe I have written an opera. At least I've seen statements to that effect in the newspapers.'

'What is its subject? What is its title?'

'Oh, I forget. I'll look it up when I go home, and let you know, if you're really curious. But if we must talk of something else, let's talk of dinner. The more I consider it, the less disposed I find myself to dine with you here. Really, in all seriousness, I shall have no appetite for my food, and what I eat will stick in my throat, if Prince Léonticheff pays for it. Come! I have a scheme. A lark! If you want to be very kind to me, and show that you're not proud or anything, you will come and dine with me. It will be like old times. Don't you remember? We will make believe we are a boy and girl again. What say you?'

'Where? Where do you want to go?'

'Where? Why, to our house, of course. There's a dinner all prepared awaiting me there; and I assure you, our cook is not to be despised. We shall be quite alone. Julian is a hundred miles away. Just our two dear little selves. There! Be nice, and say that you will come.'

'Oh, no. I thought you meant a restaurant. I can't go to your house. I mustn't.'

'Yes, yes, you can, you must. What harm? I am so old, you know, and a friend of your infancy, besides. It will be like a resurrection of dead days. Ah, don't be silly and conventional and cruel! You can't deny me this one little request. There's no earthly chance of anything happening that you wouldn't like. I tell you he's a hundred miles away. And think of the pleasure it would give me. And you yourself, wouldn't

you enjoy it a little? I want to show you our studio, our garden.'

'Oh, I should enjoy it very much. But I feel that I oughtn't. The idea frightens me.'

'There! If you would enjoy it, I'll hear no more. On with your hat, and off with us.'

The temptation was strong, and I was weak. We walked out together, and took a hansom, and were driven to Church Street, Chelsea.

III.

During the first half of our drive we chatted together merrily and vivaciously about such impersonal topics as the moment and the event suggested; but after we had turned from Knightsbridge into Sloane Street our tongues began to lag; and by the time we had left Sloane Square behind us, and entered the King's Road, our talk had quite died out. We went on from thence to the end in that sort of nervous silence which falls upon people who feel themselves to be approaching an unusual and critical situation.

Probably we were each absorbed by our

respective thoughts, conjectures, and misgivings. For me, as I realised that we were drawing near to our destination, my courage began to ooze away, giving place to a sensation very like terror, and my hands and arms grew cold up to my elbows. When at last the cab came to a stand-still, and Armidis, having alighted, turned to help me to do likewise, I felt so faint and frightened that I shrank back, saying, 'No, I can't, I can't.'

He looked at me, and understood.

'*Allons, pas de faiblesse!*' he urged, and offered me his hand.

'No. I ought not to have come. And now I can't go in. Take me back home.'

'Oh, really now, I can't have that, you know,' he grieved.

And getting hold of my hand, he pulled at it, very gently, but with such persuasive-

ness and such determination, that presently I found myself standing on the pavement beside him.

'We are pale,' he laughed; 'but our pallor is interesting and becoming, and it sets off admirably our big dark eyes. Our lair is not very terrible, and I promise you safe-conduct. But first, please examine and appreciate our exterior.'

It was a one-storeyed house, built in the style of Southern Europe, covered with yellow stucco, and roofed with red tiles; and its façade was pierced by only one window, a small grated window, high up above the door, so that the effect was rather oriental.

'It was built by a South American,' Armidis explained. 'It's horribly out of place in London, but I like it all the same. It encloses three sides of a court, and all our windows look into that. In the middle

of the court there is a fountain, and beyond, the garden. Come in.'

He opened the door with a latch-key, and led me through a short passage into a great room lighted by a big north window, furnished and decorated as a studio, and smelling strongly of paints. I felt like one in a trance, or half unconscious. I sank upon the first chair I came to, and closed my eyes. My heart was beating so hard, I could scarcely breathe.

'For heaven's sake, don't tell me you are going to faint,' he cried piteously.

'Oh, no, no, I'm all right,' I answered, making an effort to possess myself. 'A little tired, that's all.'

'I'm sorry,' he went on, 'our shop is almost empty. Most of our stock has gone to the exhibitions: the Salon, you know, the Academy—yes, we condescend to the Academy; it's only fair that they should

have a few good things, if but to teach the public how bad the others are — the Grosvenor, the New. Still I can show you one or two little trifles that may interest you, and the portrait we are at work on now—a portrait of Lady Emily Chaldicott. A duke's daughter! Oh, I told you we were smart; and if you favour us with an order, you will be in your proper element — among your own kind. Princess! . . . Besides, there's always the room itself, for you to look at. It's been a good deal admired. Take my arm, and let me personally conduct you.'

I took his arm, and walked about the room with him, looking at the canvases he pointed out, and listening to his running commentaries on them. But I could not interest myself in these things at that time. One thought, that seemed to include all others, filled my brain: 'This is his room.

I am in his room. The room he works in. This is his room, his room, his room.' It was almost as if I were in contact with a part of himself; in communion with him; with him who had so long ago died out of my life, after filling it, and now again suddenly was revisiting it, like a ghost. My emotions were too many and too turbulent to leave me any mind wherewith to appreciate his pictures.

'Well, I must say,' cried Armidis, at last, in impatience, 'you are hard to move. Unsatisfactory! Not a word of praise. Come, you are unworthy of your privilege. We will go into the garden.'

A door from the studio led into the court.

'Here is our fountain,' said Armidis. 'Perhaps you will admire *that*.'

'I admire everything,' I assured him. 'Only I don't gush. Yes, the fountain is very pretty.'

'Our South-American was a sculptor, who had a lot of money and some real talent, and one day blew his brains out. This fountain is his own work. Venus rising from the Sea. The tritest of themes, but not badly done. Stay. I will turn the water on.'

He turned the water on, and we stopped a moment to watch the fountain play. Then we went from the court into the garden.

'I hate to keep vaunting my merchandise,' he said, 'but I must impress upon you that this is a charming garden. The greensward, eh? And the old red walls, covered with ivy, eh? And the beds of geranium! And the rose-bushes! And the struggling fig-trees! And our jolly old oak, which was growing here when our grandfathers were children! Isn't it nice, now? Let us sit down yonder, on that bench.'

We sat down on the bench.

'This is the best hour for it, too,' he said; 'with the sunset colours in the sky. Do you see? We are screened from all inquisitive eyes. Nothing is visible of our neighbours but their house-tops. I feel that I must smoke a cigarette.'

Having lighted his cigarette, he began again.... 'Do you know, Monica, you upset all my theories, all my little pet notions and hypotheses. Most unkind of you.'

'What are they, the theories that I upset?'

'First tell me this, what is your ruling passion?'

'My ruling passion? Oh, that's a hard question. I don't think I have one. If I have, I don't know what it is.'

'Well, I mean, what is the most frequent, the most constant, of your emotions? What is the feeling most often in your heart?'

'Oh!' I exclaimed.

'Well?' he questioned.

'Oh, I don't know. I'm afraid no very good one.'

'Is it not—let us be frank—is it not a feeling of bitterness? A feeling of rancour in thinking of your spoiled life, and of hatred for the man who has spoiled it?'

'Oh, I don't know. Perhaps so. Why?'

'Because I have always entertained an innocent little theory to the effect that one's ruling passion, one's most frequent emotion, must have a direct influence upon one's physical character, and personal appearance. I have thought that if one's ruling passion were good and sweet, it would necessarily end by beautifying one; and contrariwise, if it were bad and bitter, one would grow ugly to the eye.'

'Ah, I see. And you find that I have grown ugly to the eye!'

'No, no, no, *tutt' altro!* That is just the point. I said that you upset my theories, not that you confirmed them. I find that you have grown wonderfully, terribly beautiful; and that is what puzzles me. You were a sufficiently pretty girl, my dear; you had eyes, you had hair, you had a skin. But you were too thin, you looked as though, if a man blew on you, you'd evaporate. Now you've rounded out; and the character of your beauty has deepened and mellowed. Your eyes were always strange and attractive; now they're . . . ! You're still pale, but your pallor is warm, where of old time it was cold. And your hair is darker than it was, and more becoming. Altogether you've improved. I hope for his own sake poor Julian will not see you. And all this improvement has taken place in spite of a passion, an emotion, that is evil, dominating your heart. I don't know what to make of it.'

'I am afraid your eyes are becoming dim. I can see in my glass that I am growing hard-looking, tired-looking, just as in truth I am growing hard and tired in spirit. I am happy to-day; perhaps that has refreshed and softened me a little. But I know that ordinarily I look hard and cold and tired. I can see it myself, and I have heard other people say so.'

'I suppose a great many men have fallen in love with you? I confess at once that I should do so if I were thirty years younger than I am.'

'On the contrary, so far from many, not *any* men have fallen in love with me.'

'You can never make me believe that.'

'Nevertheless, it is the fact.'

'Impossible. That they have never declared their passions I can well believe. You have a forbidding manner. But that does not prove that they haven't *felt*.'

'Oh, for the declaring, yes! At one time it was a favourite amusement of my husband's to set his creatures on to declare love to me, and to persecute me with their addresses. It wearied me, it disgusted me, but I couldn't take it very tragically, it was so absurdly despicable; so in the end he tired of it. Those are the only adventures of the sort that I have had.'

'I told you he was a beast before you married him,' said Armidis.

'Yes, but I was a fool, and I didn't believe you.'

'If I were you, I wouldn't live with him another day. I don't believe for a moment that he'd molest your father.'

'The mere possibility that he might, is enough.'

'How old is your father?'

'Oh, don't, don't!' I cried. 'Enough evil thoughts visit my mind, as it is. That is the

one that I have tried and tried never to allow to enter it.'

'Yet it is a question of some one's death.'

'Yes, Prince Léonticheff's, or mine. No one else's.'

'Prince Léonticheff is a very robust person.

'Yes, I know that. But robust people die. I wish he was dead from the bottom of my soul. Now do you believe I am hard? I would not go so far as to hire a man to kill him; but if a man would kill him without consulting me, I would give him my whole inheritance by way of reward. Now do you believe I am hard?'

'You say things that you don't really mean. Oh, yes, you think you mean them. Superficially you mean them; your meaning is skin-deep. Down at the bottom, though, you mean nothing of the kind. If Prince Léonticheff should die, you would be in-

expressibly shocked and grieved. For death is always a shocking thing, and the death of a brute beast like him is trebly so. Eventually, however, you would be happy. If he died a natural death, you would eventually be the gainer by it. But if he died by your connivance,—never! You would only change the form of your misery. You would exchange what you suffer now for something worse—remorse. What you ought to do is plain. Leave him. Leave him, and let him exact the penalty from your father if he will. I don't know why your father shouldn't pay, as well as you. You would have all public sympathy and opinion on your side. In the face of that, he wouldn't dare to molest your father.'

'He could cause my father to be hanged to-morrow without letting his own name once appear. No, I cannot leave him. Some day I shall probably take poison. If I weren't

such a coward! But some day I shall have the courage of despair, and then it will end.'

'I think we had better change the subject,' said Armidis. 'It is getting dark and chilly. Suppose we go into the house and have our dinner.'

After dinner, he said, 'You asked me what I had been doing lately. Just these last few days I have been writing a little melody for that old French *brunette—Encore que je sois jeunette.* I will sing it for you.'

I played the accompaniment, reading from his manuscript, and he sang his song.

'Isn't it like old times?' he demanded. 'Dear me! It makes me feel young again.'

'It is delightfully and painfully like old times,' I confessed.

'Now,' said he, 'I want to do that brunette into English verse of the same measure, so that it can be sung to my tune. You are an old translatress. Will you help me?'

And then I spent a perfectly happy evening, helping him do the brunette into English verse. When at last we had finished one stanza to our satisfaction, it was so late that I had to go home. He accompanied me, as we had come, in a hansom.

'Though I'm scarce a woman grown,
I have still my true-love sweet;
He is mine, he is my own;
And to-night we two shall meet...
Yet when I hear his footfall near
All my heart is thrilled with fear...

Yes, it will do very fairly, very fairly,' he said. 'But when will you come again? When can we resume our labours? Julian will not return for a good week yet.'

'Oh, I will come whenever you like,' I answered. 'I have enjoyed it so much.'

'Will you come to-morrow?'

'I have a lot of engagements for to-morrow; but I will break them all, and come.'

'You are an angel. I will call for you, and fetch you. About five o'clock. I am so glad to see that you have not grown proud. Princess!'

'If you call me that, if you remind me of that, I will not come, after all.'

'Oh, forgive me. It was an ill-timed jest. Good-night.'

IV.

'Ah!' exclaimed Armidis, as we entered the studio in Chelsea the next afternoon, 'a letter! A letter on the mantel!'

He picked the letter up, and held it out at arm's length, so that we could both see its superscription. It was in Julian's handwriting.

'We will open it and read it together,' he said; and tore off the envelope.

Then we sat down side by side upon a sofa, and read the letter. It was dated that same morning, from Greal, Sussex, and it ran as follows...

'DEAR A.:

'I have had an extremely odd adventure, one of those that look like ironical pre-arrangements on the part of Fate, but are in reality, I suppose, only accidental co-incidences. You will see some report of it, no doubt, in this evening's papers; but the news-gatherers are ignorant of that which gives it point.

'Yesterday afternoon a brisk south-west wind sprang up in this quarter of the world, which rapidly strengthened into half a gale, so that the waters became white with trouble as far as eye could see, and what sails there were about began to put in for shelter. Presently arrived one of the village fishing-boats; and the skipper announced that he had passed a man clinging to the bell-buoy that floats some three miles out in the Channel. He had tried, he said, to approach near enough to take the poor devil off, but

the sea was running so high, and the buoy was pitching about in such unruly fashion, that that had proved impossible. He had not even been able to get within speaking distance, and find out who the fellow was, or how he came in such a sorry plight. So, the conclusion was, there hung the man at the present moment, unless he had already lost his hold, very like to drown.

'The affair interested me a good deal; and after some enquiring about, and a lot of parleying and haggling, I finally hired a steam tug to take me out. It was roughish, there's no denying that. But we managed easily enough to come up within a few hundred feet of the buoy, and there surely enough was the man. The tug's captain refused to go any nearer,—for which, however, he could not be blamed, because it really would have been dangerous. But we contrived with some labour to launch a small

boat, and a couple of stout men rowed me up to within shouting distance of the buoy.

'It was pitching about unmercifully, and we were doing likewise. We would go up, and the buoy would go down; then we would go down, and the buoy would go up; and it was like a wet game of see-saw, to which the deafening clang-clang of the bell kept time. Well, I had a rope, with a noose at its end, like a halter or a lariat; and I yelled out to the castaway to catch it, and gave it a fling. But he didn't budge. He simply lifted up his voice, and remarked that if I wanted to get him off that buoy I must come and take him, because, he explained, he was so giddy and so exhausted that he didn't dare to let go even with one hand long enough to grab the rope. Thereat we engaged in a little argument, which was tiresome, seeing that the bell drowned more than half we said, and anyhow, I saw that he

was bound to get the best of it, and that there was nothing for it, but I must take a bath. Which I did. I hung on to the rope with my teeth, and I swam out to the buoy, and finally managed to fasten my noose about the man's waist; and then I called out to the boatmen to haul the rope in, and they hauled, and by and by, to cut a long story short, we were all safe and sound again on board the tug, and steaming back to Greal.

'Well, my gentleman was really pretty badly used up; and at first his observations were few and not especially luminous. But some warm clothes, and a nip of spirits, went a long way towards reviving him; and presently his tongue got loosened, and then he proved to my satisfaction that he had a supreme talent for wagging it. He talked ten thousand words an hour for the next three hours.

'He said he had been out in a small

pleasure boat, and a squall had struck him from behind, and capsized him; and he had managed to reach that buoy, and there he had been hanging between sea and sky for a matter of six hours. He seemed to be an effusive as well as a loquacious sort of creature, and quite overwhelmed me with expressions of his gratitude, "There's one thing I can assure you of, my friend," he said, "and that is that you won't repent it. I don't know who you are, or what your station in life may be; but I can just tell you this, that, whoever and whatever you are, I'm not the man to forget a favour, and my position is such as to enable me to reward you royally. You may reasonably count this as the most profitable day's business you have ever transacted in the course of your life." . . .

'From which, dear chum, I concluded that I had rescued either a lord or a lunatic.

'"I see, you don't recognise me," he went

on, "but then I gather from your accent that you're an American, so that's not to be wondered at. Well, when I tell you who I am, you will begin to realise what a monstrous stroke of good luck has befallen you."

'Well, now, Armidis, guess a little who he was. No, none of the Royal Highnesses; no, not Mr. Gladstone, or Lord Salisbury, or Parnell; no, nor yet a maniac escaped from an asylum . . .

'He was, he is—the Prince Léonticheff! . . . Her husband!

'Oh, how I should like to be on the spot, to see you jump around, and hear you howl, when this intelligence reaches you! That I, I, I should have been instrumental in prolonging the life of her husband! Surely, Destiny went out of her way to be ironical. As you see, I laugh about it; but I suspect it is the laughter of nervousness; down deep

it makes me feel cold. It seems somehow full of an uncanny significance, which I cannot understand.

'But tell me this one thing, you who know: will she be glad or sorry? He is apparently a most eccentric person, with a monumental opinion of himself, and divers other peculiarities equally grotesque. He tells me, for instance, that he has written the greatest novel in the English language! But I should judge him, notwithstanding, to be entirely well-meaning and good-natured; and probably she is fond of him, and will be glad. Anyhow, I hope so—for her sake.

'But suppose she is unhappy with him?

'You have told me so little about the circumstances of her marriage, and the character of her husband; yet somehow I have gathered the impression that it was a marriage rather forced upon her, and that he was not a man to make her happy. I may

have mistaken your intention, but I have certainly surmised,—more from your very silence, your very reticence, perhaps, than from anything you have said,—that it was forced upon her against her will, and that Léonticheff was not an angel. Then I have heard stories about him, remarks, and little anecdotes, elsewhere; and altogether I have got a notion that ... well, you understand. Now if this is so? If she is unhappy with him, and was at the point of being delivered from him? And then I, I of all men, stepped in to interfere! That would be too much.

'I say he seems a good-natured person, and so he does; but he is not beautiful, he is not dainty or delicate; and when I look at him, at his fat red face, his double-chin, his slouching burly figure, and then realise what his relation is to her,—well, to tell you the truth, my gorge rises, and I cannot believe

she cares for him. She, the most sensitive and high-souled woman that was ever born! I cannot believe that she cares for these fifteen stone of flesh. I cannot help thinking that life with him must be a perpetual squirm and shudder for her. But very likely I am allowing my imagination to run riot; very likely my wish is the father of my thought.

'You see, the whole affair has excited me rather.

'One thing is odd,—he does not know who I am, though I have told him my name, and that I am a painter. Do you mean to say he has never heard of me? . . . Had I become already a thing forgotten and never mentioned, when he arrived in Paris, only a year or so after my departure? But never mind. I can't talk it over on paper. There are so many things I want to ask, I should have to write a volume. When I see you,—which, D.V., will be to-morrow,—you must prepare

yourself for a cross-examination. After what has happened, I feel that I am entitled, that I have acquired a sort of right, to ask you to break your silence concerning her husband and her marriage.

'I come to town to-morrow in his company. He swears he will make my fortune for me. I may count him from this time forward as my certain friend and ally, he says. Isn't it funny? But the fun is surely of a ghastly sardonic kind. He wants me to come and stay at his house in town. I have had the greatest difficulty in begging off. I am engaged forthwith to paint his portrait and his wife's! I can't very well tell him that once upon a time I was her favoured suitor, can I?

'Oh, Armidis, it has somehow all gone straight to my sore place. You see how incoherent it has rendered me. I have to laugh a little at it, lest I should do something

mad. But I should like to go to sleep to-night and never wake. What is the use—to live with death in the soul?

'I don't know but I have forgotten to tell you that she is in town. I am, according to Léonticheff, to be presented to her as soon as I return,—to-morrow even. What had I better do? I don't see how I can get out of it. Perhaps I had best turn tail and fly to the Continent? And yet this chance of seeing her, of speaking with her, of hearing her speak, of drinking in her beauty for a moment, of feeling myself in her presence, and breathing the same air that she breathes, —oh, I cannot let it pass! It would be like bread to a starving man. Just to let my eyes rest with hers for one minute! It would renew my life, and give me strength to go on with. What harm could possibly come of it? And yet, I dread it, I dread it. For if she cares for him, and thanks me in good earnest,

her thanks will scald me. And if she hates him, she will want to curse me, and I will curse myself. This much I will say to you in a whisper: if I had known beforehand who the man was, I am afraid I never should have hired that tug. That's beastly, I know; but I can't help it.

'Au revoir till to-morrow.—J. N.'

PART VI.

DESPERATE APPLIANCE.

I.

'And now,' concluded Prince Léonticheff—it was the afternoon of the next day, and he had just given me his version of the affair: a version eloquent of praise and gratitude for his deliverer—'and now he is downstairs, in the library, waiting to be presented to you. And I shall expect you—whatever your private feelings may be; and I dare say you wish he had been a thousand miles away at the time—I shall expect you to receive him graciously, and to thank him for saving your husband's life. I will have no sulking on this occasion; let that be understood. I

am going down to him now; and you will be good enough to follow in the course of a few minutes.'

'Yes,' I responded, 'I will come at once. But first . . .'

I felt so weak and nervous, my heart was fluttering so, my thoughts were in such confusion, I had to pause and close my eyes, and rest for a moment, before I could go on. A sleepless night, a long day crowded with emotions, had quite unstrung me; and now that the actual hour had come, and I knew that Julian in living person was waiting to meet me twenty steps away, and that in another minute or two I should be standing in his presence—now the last atom of my strength seemed to slip from me, leaving me so prostrated, so exhausted, that I could neither move nor speak. I closed my eyes, and was silent for a little. Then at last I gathered force enough to continue. 'But

first I think I ought to tell you that this Mr. North . . .'

I looked up to where Prince Léonticheff had been standing. He was gone. I suppose he had left the room at the end of his own speech, without waiting to hear my reply. . . .

By and by, with throbbing pulses and tremulous breath, I started to follow him. . . I descended the staircase, and advanced towards the library—where Julian was waiting for me!—Julian was waiting for me! Oh, the joy, and the strange pain and fear! How should I greet him? How would he greet me? What would pass between us? I did not know. I could not think. My brain was whirling, all my faculties were as if frozen, my very body seemed numb and dead.

A servant threw open the library door. I entered the room.

But I could do no more than just cross the

threshold. There I had to stand still, and put out my hand, and lean against a console for support: so faint and weak that otherwise, I believe, I should have sunken to the floor.

He was seated on a sofa, beneath one of the great windows, opposite me. From the instant of the door's opening I saw him there, I could see nothing else. But to my dizzy senses, the distance between us seemed immeasurable; it was as if I looked at him across leagues and leagues of space.

At my entrance I saw him rise, turning his face towards me. It was white like chalk; and his lips were contracted in an awful simulacrum of a smile. He fixed his eyes upon me; they glowed with an intense hungry fire that seemed to burn me, so that, by a movement altogether instinctive and spasmodic, I put up my hands, and covered my breast, as if to protect it.

'This is Mr. North,' the Prince began—the sound of his voice startled me: I had forgotten that he was there—'Mr. North, who yesterday, as I have told you, saved my life at the very imminent peril of his own. Whoever is my friend must be his equally. Whoever wishes for my good-will must do him honour.'

The room had grown dim and gray to my sight; and a chill and sickness had come upon me, like those that precede a fainting-fit. All I could see of Julian was a vague black figure, unsubstantial and wavering, far, far in the distance, and a patch of whiteness where his face had been. The thought that I was going to faint, and so make a scene, acted as a spur upon me, and gave me a sort of desperate energy. I dare say it was with every sign of self-possession that I answered the Prince, 'We did not need to be introduced, Mr. North and I. We knew each

other long ago in Paris. You have often heard of him. Do you not remember?'

'What!' cried the Prince, looking amazement from one to the other of us....

So he stood for a moment, nonplussed.

'You mean to say...?' he began at last, addressing me.

He read his answer, I suppose, in my face.

'Well, I'll be hanged!' he ejaculated, with a laugh. Whereat he went up to Julian, and slapped him on the shoulder, saying with all good nature, 'Well, my boy, here's a go. Hey? So you—you're the young American painter! It's the strangest coincidence I ever heard of in my life. And how mum you kept about it! But I say, look here, did you know who I was? That is, that I was her husband?'

'No. All I knew was that a man was clinging to the buoy,' Julian answered.

It was the first time I had heard his voice

since he had bidden me good-bye in Paris, six years ago.

'No, no, I mean after we were aboard the tug,' explained the Prince. 'After I had told you my name. Did you know that I was the man she had married ?'

'Oh, yes ; I knew that,' Julian said.

'Well, it's all right, anyhow,' returned the prince, complaisantly. 'It's all right, my boy. Don't let it disturb you the least bit in the world. The past is past, and I'm not jealous of it. There's nothing small about me, and I shan't begrudge you—the man who saved my life—I shan't begrudge you my wife's friendship, even if you were, in days gone by, her lover. Sit down. We'll be quite a little family party... And I say,' he inquired of me, 'can't we have some tea ?'

I rang for a servant ; and he went on...

'No, my friend, don't let it disturb you.

If it was going to disturb anybody, you say, it ought to disturb me; but it doesn't, not in the least. You see, I'm so confident of the affections of my wife. I know all about the little fancy you and she had for each other years ago; she's told me all about it, and laughed over it with me. Oh, that sort of thing happens to everyone at a certain age; but it doesn't count, it doesn't leave any mark. On the contrary, it exercises the faculties, it paves the way for a really serious passion. Monica loves me now with such whole-souled devotion, I'd be a fool to let the past bother me. I've always been an attractive man for women; and she fairly dotes on me; she can't bear me out of her sight. But it's a wonderful coincidence all the same, isn't it? Ho-ho-ho!' he laughed.

Julian turned away, and looked out of the window. I wondered whether he believed what the Prince said. Or did he understand

that it was simply a lie, manufactured on the spot, for the purpose of hoodwinking him, relieving the Prince's embarrassment, and thrusting a thorn into me? Had he seen Armidis? If so, he knew by this time just what the relations were between my husband and myself. But if he had not seen Armidis, what was there to prevent him believing anything and everything the Prince might say?

The Prince was looking hard at me, smiling in enjoyment of his advantage and my helplessness.

A servant came in with the tea.

'Now, my darling,' the Prince said, 'let us have our tea. Come, North; tea, tea! Will you take yours with cream and sugar, or with rum and a bit of lemon? Better try the rum and lemon. Are there any cigarettes here, dearest?'

The situation was unbearable. There was nothing I could say, there was but one thing

I could do, to relieve it. I got up hastily, and made for the door, to leave the room.

But the Prince stepped in front of me....

'Where are you going, my love? To fetch some cigarettes? Oh, don't trouble to do that. Send some one. Come, you haven't spoken to your old friend yet, or shaken hands with him.'

He put his arm around my waist, and drew me back into the room.

That was the last straw... At his touch, all my hatred of him, all my scorn of him, all the rancorous ill-feeling for him that smouldered in my heart, all the angry pain that he had been kindling there during this interview, blazed up in an uncontrollable fire. At his touch...! Oh, I could have killed him!

I felt myself suddenly grow cold and rigid; then suddenly the cold changed to heat, a fierce heat that went burning through

all my veins. Then I heard the Prince say, unctuously, coaxingly, 'Come; you surely must have something to say to Mr. North,' and he gave my waist a little pressure. Then . . .

Somehow, by a quick, violent movement, I managed to free myself from his embrace; and trembling with rage, I cried, 'How dare you touch me!' Then, mechanically,—for my instinct to leave the room was still upon me,—I tried again to reach the door. But again the Prince placed himself before me. His face had turned purple, and his little eyes shone upon me with their wickedest, most menacing light.

I thought he was going to strike me. In another minute I believe he would have done so. For a second I stood still, facing him, hesitating, trying to think of some way to escape him. . .

He took a step towards me. . .

'Julian!' I called. . . .

And then, somehow, I found myself at his side, and had his hand in mine! I looked at the Prince, and I cried out, 'Julian, don't let him touch me!' . . . And all at once there came to me, in a great wave, a feeling that I had never known before. I stood at Julian's side, and I clung to his hands, warm and strong in mine, and I realised, with a mighty swelling of the heart, I realised *that I was safe!* that now, at last, for the first time since my marriage, I was safe, absolutely secure and safe! My enemy was at bay! There was no harm he could do me now, no insult he could offer me. Julian was here, beside me, holding my hands, giving me strength and courage. For the first time in the course of our life together, I met the Prince on something like equal terms. I felt as if clad in armour, and surrounded by an invincible body-guard. I

looked across the room at him, scowling threats upon me, and now somehow more repulsive, more mean and evil, in my sight than he had ever been before; I looked at him, and my passion mounted, and possessed me, and carried me away....

'Julian!' I cried, still trembling, in spite of my great joyous sense of safety. 'Oh, you will not let him touch me! Look at him. He wishes me to speak to you. He brought me down here to thank you for having saved his life! To thank you for it! For having risked your life, to save his! And then, when he found out who you were, then he began to mock me, and torture me, in your presence, telling you that I loved him, and that I had laughed with him over my love for you. He thought I would not dare to answer him, to contradict him, and he gloated in the anguish he knew he was causing me, and in my helplessness. And

then he would not let me go away, but kept me here, and wanted to know if I had nothing to say to you. And then when he touched me, and I could not control myself any longer, and could not help showing my fear of him and my loathing of him, then he became furious; and now, now he would strike me, he would knock me down, and kick me, and spit upon me, only you are here, and he doesn't dare, he doesn't dare!... You think I must have something to say to Mr. North! Do you know who he is? Do you know what he was? Oh, he was my lover,—my lover, my lover!' I repeated. 'Do you understand? And now I see him for the first time, after so many years, and so much suffering! Oh, I have much to say to him, a great many things to say to him; things that I have never been able to say to anyone before, that I never *could* have said to anyone but him, and not even to him,

except for what has happened these last two days. But he has saved your life, he has saved you from drowning; and that gives him a peculiar relation to you and me. I think he has a right to know the sort of life that he has saved, and how his saving it will affect *me*, how it will affect *my* life. I am going to tell him. . . . You, you cannot stop me. You will not dare to touch me, and I can speak without fear of you. If you so much as raised your finger against me, he would kill you,—yes, he would kill you!'

Oh, the wild joy! To let this lava-flood of passion, long pent under, long accumulating, and burning and festering in my heart, to let it at last and all at once break forth! To stand there protected by the man who loved me, the man I loved, and pour it out fearlessly upon the head of the man I hated!

'Julian,' I hurried on, 'yesterday I was at

your house, with Armidis. I was there with him when he received your letter; and I read it with him, he let me read it with him.... Look, Julian! You have saved this man's life. At the risk of your own, you have saved his life. That gives you a peculiar position towards him, and towards me. The life you saved—you have a right to know it, to know what it is like, to know what you have done. Oh, I don't blame you, I don't reproach you; but you would never have done it, if you had known beforehand. I will tell you now; I will tell you the truth about it. I have never told anyone before; I have kept it all a secret. But now I will tell you. He would like to stop me, but he cannot, he doesn't dare, because you are here. Oh, thank God that you are here! For this hour at any rate I need not fear him. It makes me feel so safe, so strong and fearless to have you here. Look at

him. Either he must go away, and leave us together, and let me tell you what I have to tell, alone; or he must stay here, and not move or speak, and listen. Julian, do you know how I came to marry him? You said in your letter you thought it was forced upon me. Oh, forced upon me! Listen. He had it in his power to procure a pardon for my father from the Emperor of Russia, so that he could return to his own country, and to his estates, and to all his rights. But he said he would not exercise this power, unless he was paid! He said he would exercise it only on one condition, for one price: I must marry him! He would not lift his finger to help my father, unless he was paid; and I was the price he asked! And at last, after long resistance, I was tired out, and I was ill, and I was a fool, and I married him. It seemed as if there was nothing else for me to do, and so I married him. But then,

having bought me in that way, he expected me to love him! *Love* him! love *him!* Oh, Julian! And because I could not love him, because by his very nature he was hateful and loathsome to me, he became furious with me, and he struck me, and he spat in my face. And after that, because I still could not love him, he made it a practice to strike me, to spit upon me, to insult me, whenever he was displeased. Then I asked him to let me leave him, to let me go away from him, to let me go to my father. But no, he wouldn't. He would not let me go, and he said if I tried to go in spite of him, he would have my father arrested and sent to the mines in Siberia! So that I have had to go on living with him, for four years I have been compelled to live with him; and there is no deliverance possible for me, except in death,—his death or mine. But oh, Julian, his beating me is nothing. If

you could hear him talk to me! If you could hear the kind of talk he delights in in my presence, to shame me and humiliate me and disgust me! He brings his mistresses to stay in this house; he sets his sycophants on to make love to me; and then before them he says things to me . . . ! Oh, imagine, imagine! And I have had to bear it all, because he holds my father as a hostage. Would you have gone out in the storm, would you have risked your life, would you have saved him, if you had known? Oh, see what you have done, what you have condemned me to! Oh, if you had only known! If you could only have let him drown!'

The Prince stood across the room, trying to laugh. As I paused, he raised his arm, and pointed to the door, and said to me, 'Get out of this room. Hold your jaw, and get out of the room.'

I felt Julian's fingers tighten convulsively upon mine. Then he turned to the Prince, and nodding his head at him in a way that was not to be misunderstood, he said, very low, very slowly, with the drawl that was his habit, and with an inflexion that gave his speech the value of a thousand threats, 'I will thank you, in addressing this lady, to be a little more choice of your language.'

'Look here, North,' the Prince expostulated, 'I don't want to quarrel with you.'

'I am afraid you will have no alternative,' Julian answered.

'Oh, I say! You don't mean to tell me that you are going to swallow the lies of that she-devil,' the Prince cried.

'I must really trouble you to guard your tongue,' Julian said.

To me, by this time, had come the inevitable reaction. Exhaustion and depression had followed my excitement, and I had

sunken upon a chair, where I sat in a state of complete nervous and physical collapse.

The Prince for a moment seemed to hesitate, uncertain what to do or say. Presently . . .

'I'm under great obligations to you, North,' he began, 'and that puts me at a disadvantage. I think, if you will fancy yourself in my place, you will grant in common fairness that I am at a disadvantage.'

'Well . . . ? And then . . . ?' returned Julian, shortly.

'Well, I don't want to quarrel with you, that's all. If any other living man stood in your shoes at this moment, it would be bad for him. If any other man had been a witness of this scene to-day, I don't think he'd live long to tell of it. But with you it's different. I can't forget what happened the day before yesterday; I can't forget

the debt I owe you ; and that puts me at a serious disadvantage. It puts me at a disadvantage, and it renders you comparatively speaking safe. Now, I don't think you're a coward, and no one but a coward would profit by a situation like this. My hands, so to speak, are tied. Therefore, I say to you, don't exasperate me. Of course, if you drive me to it, I shall have to quarrel with you, whether I will or no.'

'Yes, I think you will have to,' said Julian.

'Well, it will be your fault if I do,' said the Prince. 'But first I want to know if you can listen to reason for a moment. Of course I am prejudiced in your eyes beforehand. When a man is arraigned before another man by a woman, and especially by a woman whom the other man has been in love with, his case is prejudiced beforehand. All the same I'll appeal to your

common sense and your sense of fair play, to your knowledge of the world and of human nature, not to swallow quite as gospel the ravings of a woman in hysterics. My wife and I have had our differences, that I'll admit at once; we have had our differences, just as all married couples on the face of this planet have their differences from time to time; but to-day she lost her head, and she exaggerated, and she said things without appreciating their meaning or their gravity, and without reckoning their effect. She said things in such a way as to throw an entirely false light upon them; I dare say, in her excitement, she saw them in an entirely false light, and didn't purposely distort the truth. But I can assure you of this, she will be the first to regret what she has said to-day, when she comes to her senses to-morrow. All this business,—my narrow escape from drowning, your rescuing

me, and then her meeting with you under these peculiar circumstances after so many years of separation,—all this has wrought upon her nerves, and unhinged her, and sent her into hysterics. Now don't tell me that you're going to take seriously and literally what a woman says when she is in hysterics. She's just as far out of her right mind as if she were lying in delirium on a fever bed. And don't we all know that when a person is delirious he always says the very opposite of what he would say in his right mind? He reviles the people he loves, he conceives a passion for those he hates. The whole world is turned wrong-end-foremost in his brain; and no one thinks of giving the slightest weight to what he says. Well, it's just the same when a woman's hysterical. Monica and I have had our differences, but on the whole we're a singularly happy and a singularly affec-

tionate couple, as she will tell you with her own lips when she is herself again — to-morrow, say. I just want to ask you whether it's probable that, if I were really anything like the monster she's been describing, is it probable that she would have let herself go as she has to-day? Wouldn't she have been afraid? Afraid of my making it infernally disagreeable for her afterwards? If I were really in the habit of beating her and spitting on her and abusing her generally, as she pretends, or if she had thought that there was the remotest danger of my doing anything of that sort, don't you think she would have made a little effort to hold herself in? What would the brute that she has painted do as soon as you had gone, and he and she were alone together? Hey? Do you see what I mean? Now, don't misunderstand me; I'm not blaming her. I excuse her and

forgive her, on the ground that she had lost her head, and was irresponsible, and didn't in the least realise what she said. To-morrow she'll regret it all from the bottom of her heart; she'll send for you, and she'll contradict every word that she has spoken to-day. All I ask of you is that you'll suspend your judgment in the affair till then,—till you have seen her again, and heard her speak in her sober senses. There; now I don't want to seem inhospitable; but you had better go away now, and leave her to me.'

'Leave her to you!' Julian echoed, in a sort of gasp. 'To you . . .!'

Then he turned to me, and said, 'Monica, you must let me take you away from here. You must come with me. I will take you somewhere where you will be safe. Then I will settle with him afterwards.'

'Really, North, I put it to you as a man of

the world, aren't you going a little too far? To ask my wife to elope with you under my very nose!' said the Prince.

'Of course, Monica, you know I mean nothing of that kind,' said Julian. 'But I can't go away and leave you here. You must come with me. I must know that you are safe from him, before I can do anything else.'

'I don't think, Monica,' said the Prince, 'that you will be unwise enough to accept Mr. North's invitation. Already, if you have recovered yourself a little, you will have begun to repent your behaviour during the last half hour, and to consider its possible consequences. I wouldn't go any further, if I were you. You would only store up more matter still for regret to-morrow. I think you had better leave us now, and retire to your own rooms. I honestly think you had better. The situation is becoming slightly

strained. By leaving us you will do much to relax it.'

Indeed, he was right. Already I had begun to repent. Already every other sentiment had disappeared before a growing terror of the possible consequences of what I had done. I had given way to an uncontrollable impulse; I had leapt without looking. Now, when it was too late, after the fact, I began to look. I was appalled by what I saw. The Prince was not the man to eschew reprisals. What form would his reprisals take? . . . In the extremity of my fear, I had lost all power to think; but to my imagination his revenge presented itself like a storm-cloud, formless but black and vast, looming up on my horizon. And a sort of instinct told me that now docility and obedience would be the better part of valour.

'Yes,' I said to myself, 'I had better do as he bids me, and go upstairs.'

And I rose from my chair to do so. But then suddenly a new fear came upon me. If I should leave those two men alone there together . . . ! What might not happen ?

'Julian,' I said, 'please go away.'

He did not speak, but his eyes covered me with questions and appeals.

'Yes,' I answered, 'I mean it. Please go. You need not be afraid. It is the only way you can help me. I cannot go with you. You will do no good by staying. You will only make it harder for me if you do.'

The Prince rang for a servant. 'I will drop you a line, telling you when to come again, North,' he said.

The servant entered, and the Prince bade him show Mr. North to the door.

Julian looked at me.

'Yes,' I said, 'go, go.'

And then he was gone. . . .

Now—what would my husband do to me ?

Would he kill me? I stood shrinking and trembling across the room from him.

'I am dining at the club to-night,' he said, in his most matter-of-fact accents, 'and so I shan't see you again until to-morrow. Meanwhile you may think over the mess you've made this afternoon, and consider how to straighten it out. I don't care how you do it, but somehow you've got to convince our friend North that there wasn't a word of truth in all you said. The end is the only thing that concerns me; the ways and means are your affair. I give you twenty-four hours. I shall write to North to call at this time to-morrow. *Au plaisir de vous revoir.*'

He made a profound bow, and opened the door for me to pass.

II.

I got up early next morning, and threw open my window, and leaned out for a breath of air. It was a pale gray day. The sky was completely overcast with leaden, low-hanging clouds. The atmosphere was dim with a fine bluish mist. And though it was not raining now, I could see from the water in the street that it had been doing so during the night. The Park stretched away in front of me, dark green and distinct in the foreground, but ashen and blurred by the mist in the distance; and it sent forth from its wet turf and dripping trees a crowd of racy penetrating odours. My head ached, and every

nerve in my body seemed to be on edge, and in my breast, like a weight, there lay a dull feeling of depression and of apprehension; and the sight of the cool shadowy Park, and the smell of it, tempted me, so that I thought, 'I will go out and walk there. It will soothe me and refresh me.'

I entered by the gate opposite Salchester House, and struck straight across the wet greensward, in the direction of Kensington Gardens. The air was exquisitely keen and sweet; it was intensely quiet, save for the rustling of the leaves in the breeze and the occasional piping of a bird; and with the exception of a desultory keeper or two, the place appeared deserted.

But in a few minutes I became aware of the rapid rhythm of footsteps behind me; and mechanically I glanced around. . . A man was advancing towards me. . . It took a second for me to recognise him. . .

'Julian!' I seemed to cry out; but I spoke the word only in imagination; no sound escaped my lips.

I stood still, and waited for him to overtake me.

'I've been hanging around your house for the last hour or two,' he explained quietly. 'I couldn't keep away. But I never hoped to see you. I was seated on one of the benches below there, when a woman passed at a distance. I must have been in a brown study, or something; for it didn't strike me till a minute ago who she was.'

I could not speak, I could hardly breathe, for the turbulent rush and throb of the blood in my veins. We walked on, side by side, in silence. He carried a stick in his hand, and kept whipping the grass with it.

'Oh, it's hellish!' he cried out all at once, bringing his stick down with violence. 'The devil himself must have plotted it.

Wasn't it bad enough and hard enough already? Good God! And if they couldn't leave him there, and let him drown, and go to Hell in his own way, why did they need to choose me—me!—to step in and pull him out? I wish I had the chance again.'

Still I could not speak. We continued to walk on in silence.

By and by, 'Oh, to think, to think!' he groaned. 'Your incubus was slipping from you; in another minute you would have been free; and then I—I—had to come up and fasten him on again! Was there ever such a devilish mischance? Merciful God! To have such a thing to remember! Oh, how you must hate me!'

'No, no; I don't hate you. Don't think that; you mustn't think that. You couldn't help it. How could you know?'

'Oh, if I'd known!' he cried...

Then, after a minute, with sudden fierce-

ness, 'If I'd known,—by God, I'd have gone out there just to watch him drown!'

Presently, 'Well,' he went on, with a short, bitter laugh, 'you have a lot to thank me for. I've been your mascot from the beginning, haven't I? You see, I've had a talk with Armidis; and I know all about it now. Yes, you have a lot to thank me for—all the misery that has ever come into your life, in short. And yet you used to say, we used to think, that it was God who had brought us together! And now this, this caps the climax, crowns the good work, paints the lily! Oh, no, I didn't know. All I knew was that a man was hanging on to that buoy for dear life. I'm vain of my prowess as a swimmer, and I thought to gain a feather for my cap by going to his rescue. My motive was a low one from the outset; I see that now—vainglory. Perhaps that's why the Lord has punished me so.'

After a while he said, 'Do you see how beautiful the effect is, as you look off across the grass, between the trees, and the distance gradually melts and merges into the haze? That's one of the loveliest things in London; and it's London's own; you never find it elsewhere. Whenever I see a beautiful thing, there comes a great aching, a sort of hunger, in my heart; and I think, "Oh, if she were here, if she were here!" It's like fuel added to the fire. Thousands of times, as I've walked here in the Park, and all this beauty has poured in upon me, that longing for you to share it with me has come over me, and I have thought, "Oh, my cup would run over if she were here!"... Well, the dream has come true; the dream that I always held to be impossible has come true; and here you are! Here we are together! But, oh—the difference! Even in nightmares I never dreamed anything so horrible

as this. That I should be to blame for the ... the ... well, then ... the perpetuation of your sorrows!'

'You are not to blame for it. Nobody is to blame. It is a part of the inevitable order. What you did was noble and heroic. You could not have done otherwise.'

'Oh, if my *motive* had been noble or heroic! But I haven't even that small satisfaction. I fooled myself at the time with the notion that my motive was an unselfish desire to save a poor devil from drowning. I see now that my motive was nothing more or less than a desire to glorify myself, and figure in an heroic attitude. Vanity pure and simple. That's God's truth about my motive.'

'Oh, well, what does it matter? What does it matter?' I cried. 'It can't be helped now.'

'Tell me this,' he said abruptly. 'What

did he . . . what did he do after I had gone . . . yesterday? Did he . . . ?'

'No,' I answered. 'He did nothing. He told me that I must see you again to-day, and persuade you not to believe what I had said. He has written you to come again this afternoon.'

'You will have hard work to persuade me,' said Julian, with a grim little laugh.

'Oh, of course, of course. I ought not to have told you; above all not before him. I ought never to have spoken as I did. It put me in the wrong. But I was beside myself. I couldn't help it. And now—now that it is done, and you know it all, I don't see why I should try to make you think it was false. I have not seen him since.'

'Well, then, you have seen the last of him, thank heaven!'

'The last of him?' I echoed, puzzled, alarmed a little.

'You never shall see him again—never. You shall never return to his house.'

'Ah, but that's the worst of it. I must.'

'Must! But I say you shan't. I won't allow it. It was bad enough to know that you were married to him; but I could bear that. I could bear it because I didn't know the rest, and I had no reason to suppose you were unhappy with him. But now! Now that I do know, know it all! What do you think I am made of? I never can let you live with him again, and I never will. It is impossible.'

'There is nothing else for me to do.'

'No, no, I won't allow you to return to him,' he went on, not heeding what I had said. 'Never, never! I don't ask you to come to me. I can't invite you to that sort of life. It would be as wretched for you in its way as this. But I will put you somewhere where you will be safe from him.

You don't suppose I can stand still and let you go back to a man who beats you! Beats you! Monica! Beats you, and spits on you, and insults you! And I away from you, so that I can't shield you, so that I can't strangle him! Merciful heavens!'

He took my hand, and for a moment we stood together, hand in hand.

'You are trembling,' I said. 'What is it?'

'Oh, I don't know, I don't know. It is everything. It is because I love you so; because I have never ceased to love you, and to hunger for you, and to dream of seeing you again; and now here you are! It makes my heart leap, it makes me tremble. But oh, the horror of it, the horror!'

'Oh, you love me!' I cried.

'Yes, yes, yes! I love you. Oh, God knows I love you. If I could take you in my arms now, and crush you there, and die

with you! Oh, yes, I love you! If I didn't love you it wouldn't matter. It's the love that makes it hideous. Oh, put yourself in my place. It is just as terrible for me as it is for you. Fancy! To know that you live in constant peril of being outraged by him, beaten by him,—you, so frail and beautiful and defenceless,—you, whom I love! Oh, Monica! Imagine the hell I have been in ever since I left you yesterday, left you to him, alone to his tender mercies! Why did I do it? Why did I go away? How did I ever come to do it? To go away, and leave you alone with him, with nobody to protect you from him? Oh, I was mad, I was out of my senses; and you commanded me, and I could not disobey you then. You said it would make it harder for you if I stayed; and my wits seemed frozen up, and I did as you bade me. But now...! Now that I have you here, hold you here! Do

you think I will let you go? You have chosen to bear it, to put up with it, in silence. But I tell you that I *won't* bear it. Do you hear? There's a limit, a limit! You never shall go back. To expose yourself to his foulness and his brutality again!'

'But you don't realise, you don't reflect. I never would go back to him,—I should have left him years ago,—only, as I told you, he would wreak his vengeance upon my father. His influence in Russia is boundless. He would have my father thrown into gaol, sent to Siberia, I don't know what. He could do anything he liked.'

'That's an empty threat; brag, bluster.'

'I'm afraid it isn't. At all events, I don't dare, I have no right, to put it to the test. The mere possibility is too appalling.'

'I don't see that it is any more appalling than this actual condition of affairs. And, anyhow, it only is a possibility, whereas this

is a terribly certain fact. Besides, talk of right! Why, if anybody's got to suffer, why shouldn't it be your father? Why shouldn't it be he as well as you? Rather than you, by Jove! He made this marriage, didn't he? It was his doing, wasn't it? He was the one who desired it, who forced you into it. Well, now, let him pay the penalty of it, and bear the brunt of it. He sowed the wind; let him reap the whirlwind. You are miserable, in order that he may be happy. I can't see that his happiness is of any greater importance than yours. One human being is as good as another. That's justice and common sense.'

'No, no, it is sophistry. You have learned it from Armidis. You ought to know me well enough, you ought to know human nature well enough, to understand that I would only be more unhappy still if I tried to purchase liberty for myself at the cost of

my father's. What peace would there be for me?'

'Why don't you get your father out of Russia? Out of the reach of danger? Write to him to make a journey to Paris. Then... you can join him there, and Léonticheff may whistle.'

'Ah, but the Prince has him watched constantly. At the first move he made to leave the country he would be arrested.'

'Bah! Such things happen only in melodramas. I don't believe it. Do you?'

'Yes. Prince Léonticheff is melodramatic. At least, I believe it enough to refrain from trying experiments. Russia is not like other countries. A man may be arrested and shut up in prison, in solitary confinement, without his friends knowing where he is, for years and years—until he dies or loses his reason, perhaps—on mere suspicion. It is like the days of the Bastille. You simply

disappear, that is all. And a word from Prince Léonticheff in Russia would be as fatal as a conviction by a jury in England.'

'But he wouldn't speak the word. After all, why should he?'

'Oh, his motives would be complex. Partly for pure malice, partly to give me tit for tat. But I cannot undertake to analyse his motives.'

'Well, he may try it. He may do his worst. You don't go back to him, you shan't. No, not if I have to prevent you by main force. You talk of right. Well, you have a right to your life, haven't you? *I* have a right to it, by heaven! I shan't let you forswear it any longer. No, no!'

'Oh, what is the use of saying things like that? I have got to go back to him. I can't even think of not doing so. I've got to go back to him, and live with him. I have no choice or option in the matter. I

can't sacrifice my father. So long as my father is alive, there can be no escape for me!'

'Unless . . . unless . . . well, then, unless the Prince should be inspired to drop off first.'

'Yes. But he won't.'

'I don't know. He came mighty near it the day before yesterday. There wasn't more than an hour left in him when we hauled him aboard that tug. If it hadn't been for my infernal meddling . . . ! Why, damn him, I own the man! His life is my property. If I killed him, it wouldn't be murder. It would only be putting him back where he was before I interfered.'

Julian stopped short in his walk, and looked at me. His face was white, and very hard and set. His eyes shone with a light that somehow made me shiver.

'If I should kill him. . . ?' he repeated

very low. 'Eh? Suppose I should kill him?'

I stood trembling, with my eyes averted from his.

'I should be well within my rights,' he said. 'I should simply be undoing what I myself have done. Repairing the mischief!'

He paused for a few seconds. Then...

'Do you wish me to kill him? You have only to speak the word. It wouldn't be murder. It would be giving the devil his due,—which I cheated him of the other day. Murder! Why, it would be pig-sticking! It would be like shooting a mad dog. Isn't a man justified in killing a beast that's attacking a woman? The woman he loves!'

I had grown cold from head to foot; and there was something aching in my throat, that felt like a lump of ice. Every word he spoke seemed to pierce me through and through, and to set all the quick quivering....

'Don't, don't,' I gasped faintly. 'I can't bear it.'

'Don't what?' he questioned, with a harsh laugh. 'Don't kill him? Or don't talk about it? Why, it would be a deed of atonement, of expiation, of penance. It's the only way open to me to retrieve the wrong I've done you. If you would leave him, if you could leave him, it would be different, it wouldn't be necessary. But if you won't leave him, if you can't leave him, if he refuses to let you leave him, and compels you by force to go on living with him,—why, it's his own responsibility. If I can escape without killing my gaoler, so much the better for him. But if he places himself before me, his blood will be upon his own head, since escape I must and will, *coûte que coûte*... But there! In all seriousness, in all conscience, I believe it would be right. I believe it's the only right thing to do.

Come! Let us brush aside shams and conventionalities, and face the truth, God's truth. We have come to a pass in life where the ordinary formulas of the world won't help us. They give way beneath us like the hollow shells they are. Our position is a great, a terrible reality: we must fall back upon realities, in order to cope with it. We've got to let go the formulas of the world, and return to nature. Let us be frank and honest and unsparing. Now tell me, tell me in one word, don't you wish he was dead? Wouldn't you be glad, wouldn't it be like news of emancipation to you, if you knew that he was dead?'

'Oh, for that! Yes, I wish that he was dead. I can't see that he does good to any human being by living. Oh, yes, I should be glad to know that he was dead.'

'And now tell me this other thing; tell me in what manner, in what degree, it would

be wrong, or criminal, or sinful, or anything but holy and righteous for me to kill him? ... for me to put him out of existence? Look! He's a curse to you, he's a curse to me, he's a curse to your father, he's a curse to every living thing that comes near him. He poisons the air around him. He's a blemish, he's a danger, on the face of the earth, like the dragons, the ogres, of our childhood. Why would there be any more harm in removing him, than in removing any other mass of evil and corruption? Why, it would be to abate a public nuisance. If you should do it with your own hand, it would be a clear case of self-defence. Isn't it the same thing if you do it by proxy? If I do it for you? Besides, it's my fault that he's alive at all. I dragged him out of the jaws of death, and now he belongs to me. I should only be disposing of my own if I made away with him. And then ... with him once for

all out of God's world! Oh, Monica! It would be ours! Ours, Monica! We could begin to live! We could go back to the life and the joy that we've lost, that he has robbed us of.'

'Oh, don't, don't,' I entreated him. 'What is the use of talking like that? It is so impossible. You won't kill him, you can't kill him. Yes, I wish he was dead; but you cannot kill him. What is the use of talking of impossibilities? We may as well make up our minds to bear it. We've borne it four years, five years, already. We can bear it a few years longer more or less. And after we are dead what will be the difference? I suppose there is some reason for it, some purpose in it; there must be. No, no, we must part from each other again, and go back to our separate lives. You to your work, your painting; you will paint great pictures. And I . . . I to Prince Léonticheff,

and I will try to wait in patience for the end. The best thing of all would be for me to die. I should have taken poison a thousand times, only I don't dare, I am too great a coward. We will try to forget these last two days, and take up our lives again just where they were before it all happened.'

'Oh, if you speak of impossibilities, there is one. That is against the whole scheme of nature. As if events could be without consequences! As if we could shape our future in imitation of the past, without regard to the facts, the causes, that come to alter it. This thing has been done; it can't be undone; it's a seed that has been planted: it can't fail to take root, and bear fruit, bitter or sweet. We're not ostriches; we can't stick our heads in the sand, and ignore it. You might as well try to ignore it if your house were afire. And as for forgetting! Can I forget that but for my cursed inter-

ference you to-day would be free? Why, it's the only thing I can remember. It fills my whole brain, and burns in every drop of my blood. You see . . . you see . . . well, then, you see . . . I love you.'

'Oh, if you had only never known me, never seen me!' I cried.

'It would have been better for you, yes. For me, oh, Monica! I prefer this hell to any heaven without you.'

We were in Kensington Gardens, near the palace.

'I am going home now,' I said. 'You may put me in a hansom.'

'Home!' he echoed. 'Then you haven't heard me? I have told you that you never shall go back to that house, and I mean it. Somehow this matter has got to be arranged so that you will never pass another hour alone under the same roof with him. I could no more stand still here, and allow

you to go back there, than I could stand still and let you walk out under the hoofs of those horses in the street. Why, think of it! At any moment he might insult you, he might strike you! How can I live, and know that you are alone there with him, exposed to such danger? Fire would be nothing to it. No, you shan't go back.'

'But there is nothing else to do. Nothing else is possible, practicable.'

'Yes, there is. There is this. I have got a plan. Listen to me. I will go to him. I will go and have a talk with him. He's under a certain obligation to me, and in common decency he will have to give me a hearing. I will go and have a talk with him, and I will bring him to reason. I will persuade him to consent to a separation. I will show him that it is folly of the worst kind on his part to force you to live with him, and he will consent to a separation. Between argu-

ments and threats I will guarantee to bring him round.'

'Arguments and threats! You might as well address them to a statue.'

'Well, let me try. There's no harm trying. It's a chance. Surely the end is worth it.'

'No, no. I should be afraid,—afraid to leave you and him alone together.'

'Afraid? Afraid of what, for heaven's sake? What do you fear would happen?'

'Oh, I don't know. He—he might kill you.'

'I don't think you need be afraid of *that*,' he said, with a strange laugh.

Then, after a little pause, 'See here,' he began. 'You know Miss Wynn, don't you? Wasn't it at her house that you met Armidis the other day?'

'Yes.'

'Well, now, listen. This is what I want you to do. Let me take you to Miss Wynn's. She lives within five minutes' walk of here. Let me leave you there, with her, while I go to see Léonticheff. Then I will come back and tell you the result of our interview. That is not asking very much, Monica; do you think it is? Only that you will stay with Clotilde Wynn for an hour or so, while I see your husband. She's a good woman, she's kind and honest.'

'Oh, no, I can't do that. I have no right to involve her in my affairs. Especially not in my troubles with Prince Léonticheff. If it should ever come to an open scandal, or anything.... Don't you understand?'

'Well, then, where can I leave you? Where can you wait while I am away?'

'Oh, nowhere, nowhere. It's utterly useless. I have got to go back, I have

got to, Julian. There is no use in your seeing the Prince. No good can come of it. You never can persuade him to anything. What's the use of rebelling against a thing that can't be helped? It only makes it harder.'

'Well, I am going to see him anyhow, use or no use. All I ask is where you will wait for me meanwhile.'

'I will wait at home, I will wait at Salchester House, if you insist upon seeing him.'

We turned out of the gardens into Kensington High Street, and I said, 'Please call a hansom for me.'

'Well,' he said, with a shrug of the shoulders, 'you are determined. But so am I. You will go back to Salchester House; and I will seek an interview with Léonticheff. Then I shall know where to find you when I am ready to report. Mean-

while.... Can't you lock yourself up in your room ?'

'Oh, there is nothing to be feared meanwhile. He won't molest me in any way till this afternoon, when he will expect me to see you, you know. But your interview with him... It will be a failure. I can assure you of that beforehand.'

'Never mind, never mind. Where there's a will there's a way, and you needn't have any doubt of the will in my case. If my interview with him should prove a failure, why, then, I'll have to try something else. But I will give him that chance. If he rejects it, let him ... well, then, let him prepare for the consequences, that's all. May I ... may I drive back with you ?'

He had summoned a hansom by waving his stick. Now he helped me in.

'May I ?' he repeated.

'I think we had better say good-bye here,' I answered.

'Oh, well, just as you like, of course. It doesn't make much difference. I shall see you again very soon.'

'Good-bye, Julian.'

'Good-bye, good-bye. Oh, Monica,' he cried wildly, 'tell me that you forgive me.'

'I have nothing to forgive you for, Julian.'

'Nothing! You call it nothing? To have snatched him from the devil, and fastened him back again on you! Haven't you yourself said that so long as he lives...? Oh, if he were dead! To see him lying dead at my feet...! Tell me one thing, Monica, will you marry me when he is dead?'

'Oh, he won't die, Julian. He will outlive us all.'

'I don't know. I'm not so sure. He's only a mortal man, after all. In the midst

of life we are in death,' he said, laughing curiously.

'But it won't happen. Such things never do happen in this world. It's generally the other person who dies. If a man is a brute or a drunkard or in any other way a burden or a nuisance to people, he lives to a green old age.'

'But you haven't answered my question. If he were dead, you would be my wife, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you, Monica?'

'Oh, if he were dead, I would do anything you wished me to,' I answered, rashly, in a sudden gush of passion.

'Well, he will either consent to a separation from you to-day, or I wouldn't advise a man to bet very heavily on his longevity. I think I shall have to kill him.'

'If you could! But you can't,' I said.

'"Who lives shall see,"' he quoted. 'Good-bye.'

And the cab drove off.

To speak the bare truth, I had set my lover on to kill my husband; but it is also the truth that at the time I did not in the least realise what I had done. It did not once enter my mind to imagine that Julian's talk of killing the Prince might presently lead to the act of killing him. I took that talk as the expression of a mood rather than an intention. To wish for the Prince's death was a familiar mood to me, and it did not shock me; but I was far from perceiving that we had gone to-day a little beyond simply wishing for his death, that we had approached perilously near to plotting it. Familiar as the wish was to me, the idea was as unsubstantial, as intangible, as the idea of any impossible thing. It was as if I had wished for the earth to cease revolving on its axis; I might wish it as heartily as you please, but I could never

for an instant fancy my wish accomplished. I had accustomed myself to consider the Prince as a person invincible, perhaps scarcely mortal, certainly, at any rate, destined to flourish long beyond my time; and it was stronger than a conviction, it was a law and habit of thought with me, that in whatsoever conflict might come to pass between him and any other human being, he would surely not be the sufferer. So, when Julian said, 'I think I shall have to kill him,' and other things of like tenour, I supposed him to be uttering an emotion in the form of a purpose, but I did not suppose that the purpose had any actuality in his mind. If I had supposed the latter, I dare say I should still not have been shocked, but I should have been filled with terror for Julian. I should have felt a terrible confidence not only that he would fail in his endeavour to kill the Prince, but that

he would get himself killed by the Prince instead.

However, I do not say this by way of excusing myself. I am perfectly well aware that it is no excuse. I ought to have understood and calculated the results of my speech and attitude, and now I must not shirk the responsibility of them. Indeed, to acknowledge and assume that responsibility, is one of the chief objects that I have in making this confession. The newspapers have been full of false rumours; public gossip has seized upon every conceivable explanation except the right one. It is best on all accounts that the truth should be known; and the truth is that I, in the blindness of my pain and my passion, had set Julian North on to kill Prince Léonticheff.

III.

The following letters explain themselves.

The first, from Prince Léonticheff to me, was written at his club in the evening of the day when I had had my walk and talk with Julian in Hyde Park . . .

'I am off for what one of your particular admirations in literature has called a little tour in France. I cross to-night, but shall return within a week. I think I can promise to bring you home a surprise.'

The second, from Julian to Armidis, was written the same evening . . .

'I am going to France for a few days. I

will write again in the morning, explaining the whys and the wherefores.'

And the third is the letter promised by the last . . .

'DEAR ARMIDIS:

'I suppose you are somewhat curious to know why I am making this sudden invasion of France. I will tell you in three words: for the purpose of fighting a little duel with his Serene Highness Prince Léonticheff. If I did not say as much in the scrap of a note I sent you last night, it was because I preferred to leave you in ignorance of the matter until I had got well beyond your reach, where you couldn't interfere to stop me. Do you see? I am at this moment at Calais; but where I shall be two hours hence you will possess no possible means of discovering.

'As I told you yesterday, I had had an accidental meeting in Hyde Park with Monica. We took a walk and had a talk together; and the result of it was to show me more clearly than ever that I had contrived to make an extremely nasty hash of things. By dragging her husband out of the jaws of hell, where a kindly Providence had dropped him, I simply meddled with her life to mar it, and to perpetuate its wretchedness. That was exceedingly nice and pleasant, wasn't it? She informed me in as many words that so long as Léonticheff lived she could never look for anything remotely resembling happiness. She would not leave him, she could not, she did not dare, because he had threatened to visit his displeasure upon the head of her father. She must simply continue to endure his daily outrages and insults, until somebody went off the hooks,—her husband, her father, or

herself. It was plain enough that she cordially wished him dead, but was hopeless of his dying; and she could not conceal her regret at what I had done, though she is generous and bears me no grudge for it. "Ah, yes, if he were dead!" she said. "But he won't die. He will outlive us all." You see, she understands his character pretty well, and she knows that he could never of his free will do anything so graceful as lie down and breathe his last like a gentleman. I pleaded with her not to go back to him, and to let him do his worst, and make a scapegoat of her father if he chose; but she would not hear of it. By and by I saw that I should never be able to shake her determination on this point; so I had to cast about for other expedients. I made up my mind, and I told her, that I would see the Prince myself. I would see him, and I would endeavour in all earnestness to persuade him to consent to let

his wife live apart from him. I would give him that chance. If he refused it,—well and good. The consequences would be upon his own head. If he refused it, then I would do the only other thing left in my power that might in some degree repair the mischief I had wrought, and set myself right with Monica and with my own conscience. I would, so far as possible, undo the evil I had done, by putting him back where he would have been if I hadn't hired that tug. I would give him an opportunity to save himself by consenting to a separation from his wife; and if he refused it, I would kill him.

'I told her all this, not in the same words, but to the same effect; and she approved. I don't mean that she answered me explicitly, "Yes, go and kill him;" but she made it evident that she would not blame me if I did so, and she said that if he were dead, she would be happy.

'That is all I want to know.

'Now, Armidis, don't fly off the handle, but just listen to me quietly for one instant. There are two ways of looking at the question of killing a man. There is the transcendental-sentimental way, and there is the way of reason and of common sense. If you are a sentimental transcendentalist, as I am afraid you are, you may say of each separate human life that it is an awful and a sacred mystery, that it comes into being willy-nilly, we know not whence, or why, or to what end, and that therefore to tamper with it is to tamper with the secret things of the Unknowable. That is one view; perhaps it is your view; if so, to be consistent, you would not believe yourself entitled to kill another man even in self-defence, and you would wish to see malefactors go unhanged. It is a permissible view, but it is scarcely the view of common sense, and it is certainly not

the view taken by society. Society has agreed from time immemorial that under various circumstances it is entirely justifiable to put men to death; and death-dealing machinery is a part and parcel of society's regular equipment,—sword-arms and fire-arms, gallows and guillotines. If I am a soldier, and you are an enemy, and I shoot you down in battle, who dreams of blaming me? If I am a mere civilian, and you attack me, am I not authorised by public opinion and by the laws of the land to kill you to protect myself? That is the view of the subject taken by most sane inhabitants of the civilised world: that there is justifiable homicide as well as unjustifiable homicide: in other words, that the killing of a man is not *per se* criminal, but that it depends for its moral quality upon the particular circumstances of the particular case.

'Very good. Now, what I say is this:

I say that if it has ever been, under any circumstances, justifiable to put a man to death, — if it can ever be, under any imaginable circumstances, justifiable for one man to kill another,—then it is abundantly justifiable now, and under these circumstances, for me to kill Léonticheff. He is, as you know, guilty of crimes as black and horrible as any that any blackguard on this earth has ever committed; but they are crimes for which there is no sort of remedy in law. He has fastened himself like a vampire upon an innocent and defenceless woman; he is sucking her life out; and there is no relief possible for her except in his death,—no relief, no release. She is his prisoner, and daily he loads her with every species of ignominy and misery that his ingenuity can invent: he strikes her, he spits upon her, he empties his mind of its foulness by vile speech in her presence,—

God knows what else and worse he may do. It is exactly as though she had been taken captive by North American Indians, or by Sicilian banditti. Would I not be justified in killing them for the sake of rescuing her? Who would dream of blaming me? And in what respect is the case of the Indian different to the case of the European? How does the fact that the latter is rich, that he can read and write, that he dresses in clothes made by Poole instead of in skins and feathers, that his face is the colour of raw beef instead of the colour of copper, and that he talks Tartar instead of Chocktaw,—how do any of these facts operate to render the killing of him more sinful or less righteous than the killing of the savage?

'You yourself will not pretend to deny that on general principles his death would be a highly desirable thing. Suppose that

the other day at Greal I hadn't happened to learn that a man was clinging to that bell-buoy; suppose that consequently he had been left to drown there at his leisure: what would you have said at receiving the news of his death? What would any fair-minded man, informed of the manner of his life, have said? Come, now, be honest, and answer me that. Wouldn't you have said, Thank Providence? Wouldn't you have said, Good riddance to bad rubbish? You would have said that in every way, from every point of view, it was a thing to be grateful for. Well, if his death would have been a matter for rejoicing under those circumstances, pray tell me why not under these? In the one case he would have died as the result of an accident, and you would have cried, Good! In this case he is going to die as the result of design: will you not again cry, Good? You will, if you have a

single atom of logic and fairness in your composition.

'And then, look you, Armidis, I in a sense own the man. But for me he would have been dead and damned five days ago. If I kill him now, it won't be like an ordinary homicide; I shall simply be undoing what I myself have done. Do you mean to tell me that a man has not the right, supposing him to have the power, to undo what he has done? That a man has not the right to alter his mind, and amend a past error, if amendment is possible? Oh, it's too ridiculous, it's too preposterous; you can't stand up and maintain any such rank nonsense as that. Look: what I did was unmitigated evil. My hauling Léonticheff out of the water was an act of unmitigated evil. Now I say, it is not only my right, it is my sacred duty to go back and undo it if I can. Here—I was just supposing the

case of an Indian; add to that supposition this further one, that she was on the point of escaping from him, of regaining her liberty, and then I, I myself, blundered into stopping her, and restored her to him: would I not be doubly, trebly, justified in killing him, after I realised what I had done? Do you imagine that I am going to live out my life with that hideous fact burning forever in my memory,—that Monica was within an ace of being delivered from him, and that then I stepped in to prevent it, and that therefore for every future blow he strikes her, for every insult he offers her, I am directly to blame? What have I done to deserve such a hell on earth as that? No! I am made of flesh and blood; and there is a limit to what flesh and blood can stand, to what it ought to stand. For my sake, for her sake, for the sake of common decency and justice, I must mend the

mischief by letting the life out of him, damn his soul!

'But I must tell you my story in proper order.

'I left Monica yesterday morning outside Kensington Gardens, and I went home and I found there a note from Léonticheff inviting me to call at Salchester House in the afternoon, to hear his wife give herself the lie, and retract the charges she had laid at his door the day before. The man is sadly lacking in humour, and he wrote me that with a perfectly straight face. I sat down, also with a straight face, and I answered him to the effect that it would not suit my convenience to call at Salchester House, but that I desired to see him in private about a certain matter, and would meet him at the *** Club at any hour he would name. I sent my missive by a commissionaire, who brought me back a line

from the Prince saying that he would be on the spot at three o'clock. At that time accordingly I met him there, and we had considerable talk. I gave him his chance. But, Armidis, he is quite the most impossible person that God has ever created. I told him I thought he had better consent to let his wife live apart from him, and I advanced a hundred excellent reasons in favour of that course; but the poor man couldn't seem to see it. Finally, therefore, convinced that further argument would be wasted, I laid down my ultimatum. I told him very frankly that if he couldn't agree to a separation from his wife, I should find myself obliged to kill him. I explained the situation to him pretty fully, and he was clever enough to perceive that I had abundant motives for my enterprise. He said, however, that he was afraid I would fail in it, because he had reason to regard

himself as rather a hard man to kill. I replied that he need give himself no uneasiness on that score, and I added that, although if I shot him down in cold blood on the spot, he would be getting no more than he jolly well deserved, nevertheless, for the satisfaction of my own æsthetic tastes, I had determined to take his life in equal combat; that is to say, I proposed a duel. He demurred a little, talking some sentimental rubbish about my having saved his life, and protesting that therefore he had no desire to see my blood flow; but when I assured him that there was not the slightest danger of his having that experience, inasmuch as I had fully made up my mind to examine the colour of his, and when I added that I suspected his reluctance was rather the result of cowardice than of humanity, he said he would meet my wishes, and referred me to his friend Count Feyghine

for the arrangement of the practical details.

'I know so few men in London at all intimately that I was rather hard put to it to find a second for myself. But at last I thought of Coutances, the impressionist, and I went to him. He is a Frenchman, and he at once consented to serve. He hurried off to see Feyghine, and when he returned everything had been agreed upon. We transact our business to-morrow morning bright and early in the fields outside a little village whose name does not matter, and the weapons are to be pistols. Léonticheff's second witness will be a Pole named Tchigulski, and mine a friend of Coutances' named Margerie, both residents of Paris. Naturally enough, we don't care to let the real reason of our difference be known; to avoid which, we all dine together to-night, in the course of the dinner Léonticheff and

I quarrel, and a duel is then and there arranged.

'You needn't have the slightest anxiety on my account. I am going to kill Léonticheff. You may take that as a deliverance *ex cathedrâ*. I do not admit for a moment that there is any possibility of the affair going against me. You may comfort yourself with the knowledge that I am a first-rate shot; and then, as they say in America, my "dander is 'way up." Besides, I have the right on my side; I believe that God is on my side. I shall kill him with no more compunction than I should feel in killing a grisly bear.

'I leave it to your own discretion whether or not to show this letter to *her*.

'Good-bye. I ought to be home again within three days, or a week at the latest. But of course the *procès verbal* may delay me a bit.

'Always yours, J. N.'

* * * * *

And now!...

Now I realised what I had done. I realised what my speech and manner that morning in the Park with Julian had led to, had brought to pass. He and my husband had gone to fight a duel; he had provoked my husband to a duel, and he had done so because I had given him to understand that I would be glad if the Prince were dead. And now,—now he would be killed! The Prince would kill him! And it would be my fault, all my fault.

My state of mind may be imagined: my remorse, my terror, the agony of suspense in which I waited to learn for certain how it had gone.

Remorse? Yes; but not as yet remorse for having encouraged Julian to seek the life of Prince Léonticheff, only remorse for having led him to imperil his own. He would be

killed, he would be killed; and it was all my fault! When I said to myself, 'Suppose... only suppose... that by some wonderful chance he should *not* be killed... suppose he should kill his adversary...!' — when I allowed myself to suppose that, my heart bounded with a joy that was fearful in its violence. But that was not because I wished Prince Léonticheff dead; it was because I wished Julian alive. I had forgotten now to wish for Prince Léonticheff's death, to wish for anything, to care for anything, except just this, that Julian might not be killed. Every other thought and emotion had been swept from me by the one overmastering prayer, that Julian might not be killed.

'And yet,' said Armidis, 'that would be better than the alternative,—better than that he should kill your husband.'

'Better...!' I cried, aghast.

'Yes; precisely; better. Because, don't

you see, if Julian should kill your husband, the poor lad's hands will be stained with blood; and for men of sensitive nervous organisation, like his, blood-stains burn as long as life lasts. They're extremely nasty.'

'Oh,' I said, 'if he only comes out of it alive, it will be all I ask.'

But strong as my wish was, I had no sort of hope. For me, it was as if he were already dead. I had sent him to his death!

'You see, Armidis went on, 'at the best you will only have changed the form of your misery; you won't have reduced it; you won't have gained anything. At the best,—that is, of course, the best from your point of view: supposing Julian to come off untouched, leaving your husband dead on the field,—you will simply have got rid of a bad husband in exchange for a bad conscience. Oh, but a dreadful conscience, my dear! You will find it unpleasant enough to remember

all your life that you have been the cause of one man's death; but you will find it unpleasanter still to remember that you have made of another man a murderer, that you have branded the man you love with the mark of Cain.'

'He will not be a murderer. If he kills him in a duel, it will not be murder. He exposes his own life to equal danger. It is absurd to speak of it as murder.'

'Ah, my dear, you are as cunning as a Jesuit. You draw a distinction without a difference; whereas there is a real distinction *with* a difference which you do not appear to feel. There are, as one may say, duels and duels; duels forgivable, and duels unforgivable; duels venial, and duels mortal. There is the duel into which a man is driven by stress of circumstances, and in which he desires not the death of his adversary, but the vindication of his honour: such a duel may perhaps

be pardonable. But in matters of this sort the spirit is everything. The spirit! And Julian's spirit, the spirit in which Julian has so far acted, is simply the spirit of any murderer. He makes up his mind to kill Léonticheff, and then he selects his method. He selects the method of duelling, just as he might have selected poisoning, just as he might have selected the homelier method of sticking a knife between his ribs. He does this, as he says, for the satisfaction of his æsthetic tastes; he does it in truth to the end of dulling and deceiving his own conscience. He determines to kill your husband; and then he seeks him out and forces a duel upon him, for the sheer sake of killing him, and nothing else. It is murder. Whoso looketh upon another to desire his death is guilty of murder in his heart. The fact that I expose my own life to equal danger does not alter the moral quality of

what I do; I am less a coward, if you please, but I am not less an assassin. These are fine shades; perhaps you cannot see them. You are growing a little colour-blind. I told you long ago that your marriage with Léonticheff would demoralise you; I seem to have prophesied correctly.'

'You despise me! Why do you come here to me, if you have nothing but reproaches to heap upon me? If whoso looketh upon another to desire his death is guilty of murder in his heart, then I am a murderess ten times over. How can one help desiring the death of a man who blights one's whole life, who robs one of one's life? You never loved the Prince; why should you take the notion of his death so hard?'

'It is not, Monica, that I abhor the Prince the less, but that I love you—you and Julian—the more. You will have done one of two things: you will have caused Julian's death,

or you will have ruined his life. Neither will be a pleasant memory for you.'

'Oh, yes, I know, I shall have caused his death. I know that well enough, God help me. You do not need to remind me of that. Prince Léonticheff will kill him, and it will be all my fault. Yes, I never can forget that. I have sent him to his death.'

'Well,' said Armidis, 'it is a bad business, any way you look at it. I can't pretend to offer you any comfort; the situation admits of none. Now there is nothing for us to do but wait and see. Of course it is always on the cards that they will come out of it with nothing worse than a scratch or two apiece.'

'No, they will fight to the death. I am sure of that,' I said.

The following paragraph appeared in that evening's papers . . .

'REPORTED SHOOTING OF PRINCE LÉONTICHEFF.

'A General Press despatch from Paris says: A duel was fought at an early hour this morning, in the country near Malpierre, between Prince Léonticheff and Mr. Julian North, an artist of London. Pistols were used, and but one round exchanged, Prince Léonticheff falling shot through the heart, and expiring almost instantly. There were present two surgeons, Count Feyghine and M. de Tchigulski as witnesses for the Prince, and Messieurs Margerie and Coutances for Mr. North. The gentlemen are said to have quarrelled at dinner last night, but it is rumoured that there is a woman in the case. The two surgeons and the witnesses have signed a declaration stating that everything was conducted regularly and in accordance with the laws relating to duelling. It is not considered probable that the authorities will institute an investigation.'

Oh, as I read that, the great wave of

joyous gratitude that welled up in my heart!... Not that Prince Léonticheff was dead, but that Julian was alive! Julian, thank God, was alive! The news that Prince Léonticheff was dead did not at the time impress me or affect me in any way. I could not realise the fact, nor appreciate what it meant,—how utterly and fundamentally it would revolutionise my life, how it would change for better or for worse the whole hue and flavour of my future. I could not take it in; it was a mere detail and side-issue. Nothing in the world seemed to signify any more, now that I knew that Julian had escaped unharmed.

Armidis said, 'God pity you. God pity you and him. Now you have passed through the gate of tears, you have passed through the gate of fire, and there is no turning back.'

IV.

At the moment I could think of nothing else than this, that Julian had passed through that fearful peril, and had escaped unharmed; I could think of nothing else, and the only emotion there was room for in my heart was one of unutterable relief and gratitude. I had sent him into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and he had come out unharmed! That was all, but that was enough.

By and by, however, I began to repeat to myself, 'And Prince Léonticheff is dead! He is dead, he is dead, he is dead! Do you understand!'

At first, no, I did not understand, I could

not grasp it or realise it. But then at last, suddenly, the tremendous significance of it flashed upon me, and my heart gave another great terrible bound . . .

'Oh, he is dead!' I cried out. 'He is dead! I never shall see him again! He never can trouble me in any way again! He is dead! I am free! I am delivered from him! Oh, my God!'

'Free?' echoed Armidis. 'My dear, you were never less free than you are now, than you must be henceforth. Before, you were bound and bowed down by a heavy weight of sorrow; but now and henceforth forever you will find yourself fettered body and soul in the toils of guilt, in the chains of crime, and they will burn you unceasingly like red-hot irons. You have built your own prison-house, my dear; you have enclosed yourself within it.'

'Oh, but he is dead,' I repeated. 'Prince

Léonticheff is dead. Oh, what more can I ask or want? He is dead, and Julian is alive.'

'Do you mean to tell me seriously,' questioned Armidis, 'that the fact of his death brings you no other feeling than joy at your deliverance from him? Doesn't it shock you a little? Doesn't it terrify you a little? He is dead, yes; but that is not all. If that were all, you should have my heartiest congratulations, and I should join in your rejoicing. But, alas, it isn't all. It is only the beginning, or it is only the end, as you choose to take it. Not only is he dead, but it is you who have caused his death, it is you who have killed him. And that puts an altogether different light upon the matter. You have killed him just as truly as if you had done it with your own hand. Julian has shot him, but it was you who inspired him to do so; you were what

the lawyers call an accessory before the fact. He was your mere instrument, your agent, your cat's-paw.'

'Oh,' I cried, 'what can I care for all that? What is the use of quibbling and juggling words? He is dead! Just think of that! He is dead. The shadow is lifted from my life. He will never darken it any more. I shall never,—never!—have to see him, or listen to him, or speak with him, any more! What does it matter how he died, so long as he is dead? Oh, to think that I never need fear him any more! If you could know, if you could put yourself in my place, you would understand. If you had lived with him, in constant loathing of him, in constant dread and terror of him, for five years! I never knew till now how I had suffered. I never realised how heavy my load had been, till now that it has fallen off. Oh, it seems as if my heart would over-

flow. He is dead, and Julian is safe and unhurt.'

'I wonder whether you have really become as hardened as all that,' said Armidis. 'Or is it the Tartar in you, waking at a scratch! Or is it simply a temporary aberration of your conscience? There is blood on your hands, there is a dead man's body at your feet; you are a woman, I suppose; and yet you don't so much as shudder.'

'Why should you wish me to be a hypocrite?' I retorted. 'I don't understand you at all. Nobody ever despised Prince Léonticheff as bitterly as you did; nobody ever thought or said worse things of him. But now—one would suppose you had loved him like a brother. I don't know why I should feign what I do not really feel. I don't know why I should conceal my true feelings from you. It is not as if you were

a stranger. You have been in my confidence from the beginning.'

'Well, wait and see. It is too early in the game to foretell how it will end,' Armidis said.

* * * * *

They brought the body back to England, and buried it in the park at Argelby, Prince Léonticheff's seat in Berkshire. That was in obedience to a wish that he had expressed to Count Feyghine, before the duel.

* * * * *

The newspapers followed up their first meagre reports of the affair with longer ones; and these three facts were well ventilated: that the same Mr. North who had shot Prince Léonticheff had, before the Prince's time, been engaged to the lady who afterwards became the Princess; that he was also the same Mr. North who, a few days ago, had rescued the Prince from drowning

at Greal; and that a day or two after the rescue and before the duel, while Mr. North was paying a call at Salchester House, the Princess had made a tremendous scene in the library!

I lived of course in absolute seclusion, seeing no one but Armidis and my servants. I received, however, a great many letters; and I learned that all the world was gossiping about me, and accusing me of having induced my lover to kill my husband. I knew too that the word 'lover' was used in its least innocent sense.

Armidis said, 'Of course, that is no more than you are bound to expect. Scandal has marked you for its own. That was inevitable, in the circumstances.'

I answered, 'It is a matter of total indifference to me. Or, rather, no; I am glad of it. Because now I shall feel at perfect liberty to do as I choose in all things...

since they have said the worst they can say of me, already.'

Meanwhile we had had but a single word from Julian . . .

'DEAR ARMIDIS:

'You have seen by the papers how the thing has gone. I shall not be coming home quite yet awhile. I would rather not see anybody just yet. I want to wait till I have got a little used to it. I feel very queer.

'God bless you. Please be all you can to her, do all you can for her, in these trying times. I hope she is happy.

'J. N.'

'He feels very queer,' said Armidis. 'I should hope so. He'd *be* very queer if he didn't. He has killed a man.'

'He has killed a man in a perfectly fair

duel,' I answered. 'The man was a monster, and he killed him in a duel. There is no reason why he should feel anything except that he has done a good deed. You speak as if he had stabbed the man in his bed.'

'The difference is only one of form, not one of matter. Poison is poison, whether it be concealed in a finger-ring, or openly displayed in a bottle labelled with a death's head.'

'Oh,' I cried, 'you are what Julian called you. You are a transcendental-sentimentalist.'

'Mercy upon me! What a dreadful name! Crusher! But never mind, my dear. I am your true friend. And though you seem to me very hard and strange, I could not love you better if I were your father.'

My father! My father, upon reading the

report of Prince Léonticheff's death in the Russian newspapers, had written me the cruellest of cruel letters, taking my guilt for granted, and denouncing me not only as the murderess of my husband, but as the first woman of our family to bring a blot upon its scutcheon.

But I did not mind all this especially ; not the scandal of the world ; nor the cold morality of Armidis ; nor the bitterness and injustice of my father. Prince Léonticheff was dead ! He had disappeared from out of my life. I was free. The burden that had bowed down my shoulders, the fear and the disgust that had filled my heart, for so many years, were gone. There is no reason why I should disguise the truth. Not only had his death not grieved me, it had not even shocked me in any degree; it had simply relieved me ; I was glad of it.

What I wished most for was to see Julian.

I did not know when he would return, but I counted the hours. I longed to see him with my eyes, to touch his hand, to hear his voice, I longed to feel him near to me. The longing was acute and unceasing, like a spiritual hunger. I longed for an opportunity to pour out for him the great store of love and gratitude that were garnered for him in my heart. He had taken such an awful risk for my sake, he had rendered me a service so immeasurable! The devotion of my life should be his henceforth; but nothing, not even that, could ever adequately pay him, or discharge my debt. I had a thousand things to say to him, a thousand plans to propose to him, when he came home. But when would he come? Why did he delay his coming, like this? I should have supposed he would be as eager to see me, as I was to see him. Then why did he not come home?

'The time seems very long. Will he never come?' I asked of Armidis.

'Oh, he feels queer, he feels queer, you see,' Armidis repeated. 'He has killed a man. Therefore he has a state of mind.'

'Oh, will you never finish harping on that string?' I cried in anger.

'Well, suppose he should come, suppose he were at home at this very instant,—you couldn't see him, you know. That wouldn't do at all.'

'Wouldn't do . . . ?'

'Why, consider the proprieties! How could you with any sort of countenance have a meeting with a man hot and red-handed from killing your husband? You must observe the conventions of your widowhood. What would people say?'

'It makes me smile to hear you preaching the conventions and the proprieties, you of all men. I don't care what people would

say. They can say nothing worse than they have said already.'

'Quite so. But they don't more than half believe what they say at present. If you and Julian should be known to have met, on the other hand, it would be confirmation strong as proofs from holy writ.'

'Well, I don't care. I don't care what people say or believe. But I don't see why we could not meet without anybody's knowing it at all.'

'There speaks the woman, who loveth mystery, subterfuge, intrigue. A secret meeting! Yes, it would be romantic. But I don't think it will come to pass. I doubt if Julian will return to England for many a long day.'

'What do you mean? Have you heard from him? What is it?'

'Yes, I had a second note from him this morning. Here...'

He handed me this note...

'DEAR ARMIDIS:

'Please tell Calebs to pack some clothes in the yellow leather box, and send them to me at No. 32, Rue de Bourgogne, Paris. I am thinking of going away somewhere, I don't know just where. On some accounts I should like to come to London, on others I dread doing so; and on general principles I believe I had better keep away. I don't know just what good I could do by being there, and I can imagine a deal of harm. I never dreamed that I should feel like this. I can't get it out of my mind. Sometimes I feel as if I would give my life just to see her for a little while, and then at others I feel as if I could not bear to meet her. It is the same about you. Sometimes I long for a sight of you, a word with you, and then at other times I shrink from the

mere thought. You see, it has upset me. But I shall get over it, and be myself again, presently. So long as I can feel sure that she is the better off for what I have done, I cannot repent it. I have twenty times been at the point of coming to London, and then at the last moment I changed my mind.

'Always, J. N.'

'You see, it is as I said,' commented Armidis; 'he has a state of mind. You may answer that he had a state of mind before he did it. Then he remembered that he had saved your husband's life, and that made him writhe; but now he remembers that he has taken it, and that is worse. I have never taken anyone's life myself; but I know how I should feel. Imagination! The whole colour of the world would be changed for me; I should feel the mark of Cain

perpetually scorching my forehead; I should feel cut off utterly from the fellowship of other men and women, of those who hadn't done what I had done. It would be an experience of a nature to shake and overturn my life from its deepest roots. It would alter the very essence of my soul. I should feel that I had changed my skin, and become a member of another race. A race apart! You have called me a naughty name; you have called me a transcendental-sentimentalist. But the point is that Julian is another. Unless I am very much mistaken his state of mind is like what I have been describing. Blood has been spilled upon him. It is like sulphuric acid; first it eats into the skin, smarting like fire; then it will eat through the bones and the muscles, into the inmost heart. Poor Julian!'

This was in the evening, about ten o'clock, at Salchester House. A little later that

same evening Armidis's man, Calebs, called, and asked to see his master. When Armidis returned to me, he looked very grave.

'He has come home,' he said, and handed me a sheet of paper...

'I could not stand it any longer. I thought I was going away, but I have come home. They tell me you are with her. I should like to see you whenever she can spare you.'

It was in Julian's handwriting.

'I think I had better go to him at once,' said Armidis.

'Yes. I will go with you,' I said.

'Oh, no!' he cried.

'Yes. I must. I want to see him.'

'But consider... It is the height of imprudence.'

'You used to tell me to throw prudence to the dogs.'

'But suppose — suppose he should not wish to see you?'

'I am going with you,' I repeated. And I ordered my brougham.

V.

ARMIDIS opened the door of the house with his latch-key, and stood aside for me to enter. I hastened through the hall, into the studio, where I took for granted that Julian would be waiting. The room was lighted by candles, a light soft and rich, but dim, so that at first objects and shadows were not quite distinguishable. But after a minute I saw him. He was seated in a deep arm-chair, before the empty fireplace. His head was thrown back, and his eyes were closed, but I did not think he was asleep. His profile was towards me; the skin gleamed waxen-white in the candlelight,

and the cheeks and temples looked thin and sunken. I remained for an instant near the door, without moving or speaking. Armidis came in, up to my side, and stood there till his glance, wandering, rested on Julian. Then he nodded to me, and stole out of the room on tip-toe, shutting the door behind him.

'Julian!' I called, very low.

Slowly he opened his eyes, and turned his face in my direction. At first its expression was blank and puzzled, as if he had been suddenly recalled from a brown study, and did not recognise me; but all at once it lightened; and he cried, 'Oh!' and sprang up, and advanced towards me. . . .

I stretched out my hands. Oh, how full my heart was! How tumultuously it throbbed!

But when he had taken three or four

steps, he stopped, suddenly, shortly. He stood motionless for a second, staring at me with eyes that were almost vacant. Then a sort of spasm passed over his face, and he cried 'Oh!' again; but this time it was like a sharp cry of pain. He made a sort of convulsive gesture with his arm, and turned around, and went back to his chair, dropping into it like something inert, rather than seating himself with the elasticity of life. He turned his face quite away from me.

I hurried up to him . . .

'Julian! What is it? What is the matter?' I asked, in fright and anguish.

'Oh, I don't know, I don't know. I can't help it,' he answered. There was something awful in the quality of his voice; a note that chilled me with unimaginable terrors.

I knelt down beside him, and looked up

into his face. But he turned his eyes away from mine.

'Julian! What is it?' I entreated, in a moan.

Then he seemed to be seized by an impulse of tenderness. He put out his hands, and took mine, pressing them very hard, and he looked into my eyes with a look of great love, and he said, 'Oh, my darling! My darling!' But instantly after that, the same spasm that I had seen before passed over his face, and he dropped my hands, and he shrank back into his chair, as if to avoid even the touch of my garments, and his eyes became as cold and impenetrable as steel, and his face somehow looked to me as if it were infinitely far away.

'Oh, Julian, what have I done? What is it?' I asked again.

He gave a short laugh, and appeared to recover himself. 'Oh, it's nothing,' he said

lightly. 'Nothing, except that I feel queer. It's been an experience, and I feel queer. But it doesn't matter. If you are happy, if you are glad, if it's been a service to you, it doesn't matter how I feel. I dare say I shall get over it.'

'Oh, Julian, it isn't only that I am glad. It isn't only that you have rescued my life from a horror, and given it back to me. But it is the awful peril you encountered for my sake, the dreadful danger that you faced. What if you had been hurt! What if you had not come back to me! The thing that I am most thankful for, that I never can thank God enough for, is that you have come back safe and unharmed. Julian!'

He took my hands again in his, and murmured something inarticulate; whilst his eyes rested with mine for a minute, and seemed to devour me. It was as if for

that minute our souls went out to each other, and met and mingled. But then his withdrew itself from mine; his eyes became hard and impenetrable again; he put away my hands, and he said, 'You don't realise. You don't realise what I have done. If you realised that, you would understand.'

'I do realise it, Julian. I know what you have done. What you have done is good, wholly good. It is good for everybody, good for the whole world. No harm, no pain, no evil, nothing but good, can come to any human being from what you have done.'

'Except to myself. For me... oh!' He threw out his arms, and shuddered. 'For me, it's been my undoing.'

'Oh, why do you talk like that! Why do you feel like that? What do you mean?' I cried.

'I have killed a man. I have shot a man

down in cold blood. I have seen him stagger, and totter, and turn half way round, and fall. I have heard the sickening noise he made as he fell, the dreadful noise of his last breath, the dull noise of his body striking the turf. I have seen him lying before me, red and white and dead. I have seen nothing else, I have heard nothing else, for eight days. Oh, it is horrible!' He put up his hand, shielding his eyes, as if to shut out a vision.

'Oh, my God!' I cried. 'If it has made you feel like this! Oh, what shall I do? You said—you said it would be like shooting a mad dog; you said you would feel no more compunction than in killing a grisly bear. What you have done! You have done a thing wholly, entirely good. You have put an evil thing out of existence. You have removed an evil thing from the world. That is what you have done.'

'Yes, yes, I know that. I am sure of that. He was bad; it is a good thing that he is dead, that he is out of the way. The only doubt is whether it was a good thing that I should kill him. Whether that was not a greater evil still. It is a good thing that he has been removed; but was it my place, was it my business, to remove him? After all, you see, he was a man. God made him, God kept him alive, God must have had some reason for it all; and I feel as if I had interfered. He was a man, yes, after all, a man. I never realised that, I think, until I saw him fall down dead before me. Then . . . ! Oh, if you had seen him there! It makes you feel queer, very queer, to see a man fall dead, and to know that you have killed him, that it is your doing. To see him lying dead there, and to know that he will never breathe or move again, and to realise that you have done it! To

realise that you have done it, and that you can't undo it,—never, never! It's rather awful. It upsets you, it overturns you, it changes your life utterly, in a single minute, changes its whole complexion. You see,' he added, with a smile of irony, 'one kills a man so rarely! It is an experience. I dare say if one had killed a great many men, one would get used to it. But it's the first step that costs. For me,—I think in killing him I killed myself. I have felt as if a new self, a strange self, were in possession of me ever since.'

His manner, his voice, the character of what he said, seemed to indicate great weariness, almost apathy; but an apathy, I felt, which was but the extreme point of profound and strenuous inward emotion.

'And I have brought this upon you!' I groaned. 'I have brought you to this. But it can't last, Julian; it mustn't last; it is

not as if you had done a wrong thing. You must let me, since I have brought it upon you, since it was for my sake, you must let me . . . you must let me comfort you, restore your happiness. The words sound so meaningless, but you understand. I love you, and I owe you everything. My life is yours now forever. Oh, you can't be unhappy long. It has shocked you, it has made you ill. But that will wear off; you will get well; I will make you well. Do you remember what you said? The world would be ours! It *is* ours now. There is nothing between us.'

'Do you remember what the Lord said to Cain? *And now thou art cursed from the earth!* Those words have been ringing in my ears ever since. And now I am cursed from the earth! That is how I feel.'

'Oh, to compare yourself to Cain! You

are mad, Julian. You are morbid. You have killed a man in a duel. A perfectly fair duel, where he had an equal chance of killing you. Hundreds of men have killed men in duels before this, and they have not felt as you feel. . . . They have lived perfectly happy lives afterwards.'

'Well, I don't appear to be that sort of man. Anyhow, it is different. It was a duel, and it was fair enough, I suppose; but it wasn't an ordinary duel. It was a duel which I devised and manufactured simply and solely to the end of killing him. It wasn't a duel into which I was forced, nor one into which I entered impulsively, in hot blood. It was a duel into which I forced him, and into which I entered with my blood as cold and as serene as water. It was a duel which I concocted and brought to pass just with this one thought in my head, that I would kill him. But that doesn't matter

much. The trouble is that I can't get it out of my mind, I can't chase it from my memory, I can't see anything else wherever I turn. The only thing I can see is his dead body lying there on the grass, limp and ghastly, with his white shirt all red with blood, and his eyes staring up with such a sickening, glassy look! I believe I shall never be able to see anything else as long as I live. Oh, my God!'

I knelt at his side, speechless, helpless, heart-sick, in despair.

'It is funny,' he said. 'A few days ago I was in an agony of mind because I had saved his life; now I seem to be in a worse agony because I have taken it.'

Just the words that Armidis had spoken of him!

'I tell you all this very freely,' he went on. 'I am sorry to do so. I never meant to tell you. But you have come here. I

can't keep silence. I suppose I had better tell you the truth.'

'Yes, yes,' I answered, automatically.

'I say to myself that he was a brute and a devil, and that his death means freedom and life for you; but it doesn't do any good. I suppose you will think me weak, weak and sensational. I can't help it. Perhaps... perhaps... well, then, perhaps it is the artistic temperament.' He smiled grimly.

'I can think nothing but good of you,' I said.

After a long silence, he began, 'Yes, there's no getting around that. It has altered the whole complexion of my life. I am a different being, a different kind of being. I have crossed the line, I have passed the pale. I have been initiated into mysteries of which other men know nothing, dream nothing. I can have no fellows any more. I am alone, apart. The ordinary

purposes of life, the ordinary occupations, pleasures, companionships, things to hope for, things to fear, to avoid,—they have all lost their meaning for me, their meaning and their colour and their savour. Or I have lost myself. It is the same thing. I have not been myself, known myself, felt myself for a single instant since. It isn't pleasant. I know it would be to throw you back into the depths of your great misery; and yet, while I am telling you the truth, I may as well tell you this, that there have been moments, many moments, when I have felt that I would sacrifice you, that I would give up heaven and earth and everything, that I would sit still and let them cut off my legs and arms and sear my body with red-hot irons, if I could only recall it and undo it, and be my old self again as I was before it happened. There! I was unhappy enough then, God knows; but I did

not have this awful sense of difference, of isolation, from the rest of men. But now,—well, it is as I said,—I am alone, apart.'

'You are not alone, you are not apart. You shall never be alone or apart. I am with you. I will never leave you. If it has removed you from the ordinary plane of life, has it not removed me with you, at your side? And so long as we are together, what does anything else matter? Aren't we sufficient to each other? You are sufficient to me. It is all I ask. Just to spend my life beside you, in devotion to you!'

'Yes, you are with me; that is true enough. We were partners in it, after all. We planned it together. Yes, it takes us two, just us two together, and separates us from all other human beings, from all human fellowship and communion. *They* may not feel it, but we will, we must. They will see in us only a man and a woman; but we will

know! It unites us as nothing else ever could have done; it binds us together with chains.'

'Well, so much the better!' I cried. 'I don't believe that what you say is true; I don't see how it can, or how it should, separate us so from other people; I am sure that this feeling of yours will wear away; it is only a first result; the final one must be different. But suppose that I am wrong, and you are right,—so long as we have each other! I cannot wish for anything more.'

'Ah, but . . . ! It unites us, yes; it joins us together, yes; but at the same time it has another effect, a contrary effect. It binds us together indissolubly, and yet it divides us utterly, it puts us utterly, irrevocably asunder.'

'Asunder? I don't understand that,' I said.

'Oh!' he cried wildly, in sudden passion, starting up from his chair. 'Don't you see? Look! Look!' He pointed to the floor, between us, staring with wide horrified eyes, his face white as paper. 'Look! There is a dead body between us! There is blood between us! We cannot cross it,—never, never! Because it is there, it is immovably there! It must keep us always, always apart. And yet we cannot leave it, we cannot go away from it, all our lives we must remain there, one on either side of it! Always within sight of each other, yet never near enough to touch, never daring to speak, because of the awful dead thing that lies between us! Oh, my God! God help us! We are like two slaves, condemned to carry the same burden, a heavy burden, a ghastly burden,—a corpse! a dead man's body!—condemned to carry it between us, one at each end, yet never allowed to exchange a

word, never allowed to touch each other's hands, never a word or touch of sympathy, of compassion, of encouragement!'

I went up to him, and put my hand upon his shoulder. 'Oh, Julian, for mercy's sake, calm yourself,' I begged him.

'Don't touch me!' he cried harshly, starting away from me. But then, instantly, 'Oh, forgive me! It was the horror of it. Forgive me!' And suddenly he threw his arms around me, and strained me to him, covering my face with kisses, and repeating my name, 'Monica! Monica! Monica!'

But then, as suddenly as he had seized me, he released me, and moved a few steps away.

'We have gone from the devil to the deep sea, I am afraid,' he said. 'We have got rid of Léonticheff, but we've got this horror in his place. We have only changed one misery for another. What sort of world is

this? On what principle does God distribute His punishments and His rewards? Léonticheff never suffered for his sins. He sinned, and sinned, and sinned again, and was never the worse for it, was he? We sin just once, if it was a sin to kill him, and see how we are overwhelmed! The punishment is capricious and one-sided. Ten guiltier men than I go free; why must I suffer? It isn't fair.'

'You mustn't suffer, Julian; you shouldn't suffer; you won't suffer, after a little while. It wasn't a sin to kill him. Your suffering is only for the moment. It is a shock. It will pass. It must pass. If you love me, if you care for my love, you cannot be unhappy long.'

'Ah, that's just the point! If I love you!'

'You do love me, don't you?'

'I don't know.'

'You don't know . . . !' I faltered.

'I don't know. I'm not sure. Or, rather, yes, I do love you, only . . . it's this way. Everything is so changed. All my feelings are so different. Sometimes I love you; sometimes I think that my love is dead, that I have killed it, that it has been destroyed, swept away, in the general overturn. That is the worst part of the whole affair. It seems to have killed, to have burned out from my heart, every other feeling, every other thought or interest. Yes, at moments I love you, I seem to love you more entirely than ever before; then at other moments the horror of the thing simply overwhelms me, and obscures my love, and I cannot find anything in me but indifference towards you. I think of you, I speak your name, I picture your face before me, but they do not move me or affect me any more than the thought or the name or the face of a stranger

would. I am speaking the truth brutally, but you may as well understand it first as last. Then at other times still, it does not stop at that. The horror of it mounts and mounts, till it seems to penetrate every atom of my brain and body; and then I am no longer indifferent to you, but my horror includes you in it, and I... well, then... I hate you. Then by and by my love comes back, and so it goes, alternating in waves. Day, evening, night; love, indifference, hate.'

'Oh, merciful God! I have made you hate me!' I cried.

'No, no, no, not that. You have not *made* me hate you. I don't mean that I do hate you, either, exactly; I mean simply that the horror which is upon me sometimes includes you, as it includes every other thing, person, circumstance, in any way connected with what I have done. The boat I crossed

the Channel in, the inn I stayed in at Calais, the people I passed in the streets the day before the duel, Malpierre, and the field in which we met, and the grass we stood on, and the men who were present, the very sky above our heads, the air we breathed,—my horror is over all these things; and sometimes, not always, it includes you... That is the worst of it all.'

'Then... that... that is why, when I first came into the room, and called you, and you were coming towards me, that is why all at once you started back, and turned away from me! You hate me because it was I who set you on to do it! Oh, I deserve it, I suppose I deserve it.'

'No!' he cried, coming to me, and taking me in his arms again, and drawing me down at his side, upon a sofa. 'No, you don't deserve it, and it isn't so. It was only an illusion; but now when I see you, yourself,

really here near to me, and know that it is you, your own real self, no, I feel nothing in the world but just love for you, and joy in you. Everything else goes ; and so far from my horror at that thing obscuring my love, my love chases away the horror. Oh, it is you! And you love me! And you will be mine! You will be my wife! There is nothing to keep us apart any longer!'

'Nothing, nothing! I will be your wife. I will be anything and everything to you that a woman can be to the man she loves, to the man who has faced death for her, and delivered her from the evil that was over her whole life. Oh, you will not be unhappy. Tell me, promise me, you won't.'

'Unhappy! I can't believe I have ever been unhappy. I am the happiest man in the whole world,' he said. Then he laughed, and added, 'I'm sure you never can guess what I thought of just then.'

'What? Tell me.'

He looked at me with smiling eyes for a moment; and then he said, 'Do you remember? What we used to comfort ourselves with in the old days in Paris? *Entre nous le passé ne valait pas le diable; l'avenir sera délectable; en attendant jouissons du présent!*'

'*Eh bien, donc, jouissons en!*' I whispered, laughing for happiness.

And then . . .

VI.

THE next morning, at Salchester House, I received this letter from him . . .

'No, it is no use. After I left you, it all came back upon me, ten times stronger than before. You see, I was not quite frank last night. I told you nothing but the truth, yet I did not tell you the whole truth. I told you what I felt, I did not tell you what I thought. My feelings, you said, would pass away ; I did not contradict you ; indeed, I tried to lull myself into believing as you did for the time ; but down deep I knew they would not pass, I knew they could not. If they were feelings alone, and

stood by themselves,—rested upon themselves,—yes, they would most likely pass. A mere wound must heal after a certain lapse of time; but where it is not a mere wound? Where it is a sore, the consequence of a poison in the very composition of the blood? The truth is that they are not simply *feelings;* they do not rest upon themselves; they rest upon a conviction, they are the consequences of a conviction,—a conviction that has within a few days become as deeply rooted and as vital in me as my life itself. That is what I concealed last night, what I tried to forget last night.

'It has come upon me, Monica, very late in the day and very suddenly, you may say, but not with less force or staying power because of its tardiness or its suddenness; it came upon me with overwhelming force, like a voice from the sky, the very second I saw him fall,—this conviction: that I had

been deceiving myself and making my conscience drunk with lies and sophistries, and that, in bare reality, I had meditated, compassed, and now committed a Crime, a great, terrible, irremediable crime. When I saw him turn, and totter, and fall,—it was as if the skies opened, and the voice of God cried out, *And now thou art cursed from the earth*, and the hand of God placed a seal upon my brow! Why did God let me go so far? Why did He not open His skies, and let me hear His voice, before it was too late? Or, having allowed me to go so far, why could He not have allowed me to go on forever? Why, when it *was* too late, let me hear His voice at all?

'Anyhow, I must try to explain it to you.

'We, you and I, were in a terrible situation; that is undeniable; a situation partly thrust upon us, partly of our own making; and one as heavily fraught with pain as

almost any human situation can be. But we had this one consolation, though we did not realise how great a consolation it was,—we were innocent, our hands were clean. So, though we did not know it, our situation was not altogether hopeless. I see now,—it is a truism, but for me it is a new discovery,—I see that so long as a man's own soul is innocent, his own hands clean, no situation in which he can be placed is altogether hopeless. But ours seemed hopeless to us; our pain obscured our vision; it seemed hopeless to us, and it seemed intolerable; and we looked about for a way out of it. No, we were hemmed in on all sides; only at one point we saw what looked like a way out of it, we saw one little opening. There was just one path, one gate, through which we could make our escape; we did not stop to question whither that path led, whether possibly it might lead to

another situation worse and more intolerable still; it was a way out, and we took it.

'Well, the one gate we saw was the gate of sin, the path was the path to hell. That is where I find it has brought me, anyhow. We had been innocent, our hands had been clean; but after we had passed that gateway, we were guilty, our hands were stained with blood! We fought the devil, as the saying is, with fire. We endeavoured to overcome one evil with another evil, a greater evil. It didn't pay. For me, I confess, I have got the worst of it. We have exchanged a situation that was bad enough, but not hopeless, for a situation that is worse, and that *is* hopeless. Our parts in the play had been those of injured innocence; we were the victims: but now we are the heavy villains.

'I don't know whether I make myself clear to you; but it has all come upon me

with a force and a light as great and as certain as if it were a revelation straight from God. Before, we were the victims; now we are the heavy villains! The shot I fired turned the tables quite around. We had been in the right; it put us in the wrong. The same shot that killed Léonticheff's body, destroyed our souls, destroyed the innocence of our lives, and placed anything approaching happiness or peace forever, forever beyond our reach. Could we ever, do you think, be happy together, with that awful burden of guilt between us? Knowing the price at which we had purchased our liberty and our unity? We could never be otherwise than utterly miserable; we would come to blame each other, to lay the responsibility each at the other's door, to hate each other. I preach? No, no, it isn't that. Only I know that I have committed a dreadful crime; a crime which

I can never undo, or atone for; and I know that I can never forget it, that I can never ease my mind or my memory or my conscience of the weight of it. Do not deceive yourself with the notion that I am simply upset and shocked, because I saw a man fall dead before me by my hand. That is bad enough, but if I had killed a man under circumstances which I could consider justifiable, I should be sure that a little time would make that right. If I had killed a man when he was in the actual fact of attacking you, for instance, and I knew that I must kill him to save your life! But I killed him in circumstances that were not justifiable; I killed him because I wanted to get him out of the way; I murdered him; and I never can get over that. Don't misunderstand me; I am not sorry that he is dead, I am glad that he is dead; his death was, so far as I can see, in every way a

desirable event; I am only sorry that *I killed him;* I think his death was desirable, but I think it was more desirable still that you and I should retain intact the innocence of our souls. It is this way: better that a thousand guilty men should live and prosper, than that one innocent man should become guilty.

'What am I going to do? Well, I will tell you in one word that I cannot bear it any longer. I have borne it unceasingly every hour of every day and night since it happened. I can't describe what I have suffered, I can't give you any idea of it. My life has simply been steeped in horror ... horror when I lie down, and horror when I get up, horror, horror, horror! I once saw a man in *delirium tremens.* I dare say the comparison is grotesque, but I feel just as he appeared to feel. Everything I see, every sound I hear, makes me start and

tremble through and through with horror. I can't bear it any longer, it is unbearable; I don't know any reason why I should try to bear it; it is too much. As long as I live, it must be so, it must be the same; as long as I remember. Therefore, the shorter my life, the better for me. If I knew of some good cause in which I could lay down my life, I believe I should go and do it. But I am not aware of any good cause in the world at present wherein a man can serve, and yet die an instant death. Nowadays you must live, if you would serve a cause. I cannot live any longer. Besides, I don't set much store by causes, after all; I am not a humanitarian. I cannot live any longer. I have stood this agony just as long as I can stand it. The first part of the curse of Cain I accept: I am cursed from the earth. But I will not accept the second part: I will not go on living, a vagabond

and a wanderer, with a brand upon my forehead, and an unceasing fire in my heart. To-day will be the last day. I will finish this letter, and send it to you, and then I will *. . . cela va sans dire.*

'Don't say that I am leaving you to bear it alone. I could not help you in any way if I remained. We could never be anything to each other,—with *that* between us! The way of the transgressor is hard; we should have to tread it; each would feel that it was the other's fault which had brought us there. We could never be anything to each other. We were happy last night? Yes, perhaps, for a little while, with the short-lived ecstasy of passion. But afterwards? For me it was worse than ever.

'Destiny seems to have been against us from the beginning. Good-bye. I would wish to live if I could say I love you,—if I could feel one spark of my old pure love

for you, my innocent sweet love, in my heart. Good-bye.'

* * * * *

* * * * *

I have been very ill since then; the doctors warn me that I may not have many months to live. I have written these pages in September and October, 1890. If I should die soon, they will be published. If I should disappoint the doctors, and live . . . ?

THE END.

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